
Mushoku Tensei

– Isekai Ittara Honki Dasu –

– Volume 22 –

Young Man Period

~ Organization Chapter ~

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Chapter 1

Return, Report and to the Next Stage

Part 1

--- Lilia's Point of View^[1] ---

That day, Elinalize-sama had visited us.

She came to our house once every few days and proceeded to make small talk about how a wife should be.

Getting married, settling in a residence, even giving birth to a child, her husband going to a distant place, she would be lonely. Since I am a wife as well, I can properly understand such a feeling.

However, her behavior is as usual, and something like loneliness cannot be sensed.

She might have a bit of composure.

Perhaps because of that, she frequently comes along and we receive consultation about the ways of a wife.

At what age and how should a child be given education, from matters like that to trivial talk.

"I wonder how soon until Aisha learns to behave more like an adult."

"Let's see. It's not like she can't do something like that.....until a time comes when she personally thinks it's necessary, she most likely won't do that."

"Personally, meaning?"

"If she will be able to love a man or the like....."

"Would it be bad if it's Rudeus-sama?"

"You should know it as well. The reason Aisha behaves like this is because she is Rudeus's little sister."

"A little."

"Then it's necessary to find a different person for her. A partner who doesn't turn his face when Aisha doesn't behave herself like an adult."

"Hmmm~....."

That day, the one taking the advice was none other than myself.

Elinalize-sama looks much younger in appearance than me, but as I thought, it must be because of an old-woman's wisdom, I have to give a firm response.

"That is absolutely right....not relying on someone younger; people who carry excess admiration for adult woman are good."

"Excess admiration?"

"Yes, if it's Aisha, since the thing that is called reality can be taught while satisfying the longing of such boys.

I am well aware of the fact that Aisha can never be together with Rudeus-sama.

Rudeus-sama as well does not wish for it, nor does Aisha.

Having said that, I don't think she will ever bring a companion for a formal marriage interview.

"Well, I would like it if it doesn't become like that." [2]

"Yes.....huh?"

Incidentally, when I hung my head and answered, Leo's figure was slowly revealed in the dining room.

Lara-sama and Lucy-sama were riding on his back.

Probably playing Horse-horse.

"Wau!"

Leo barked towards me.

What might it be? Given that he is very smart, he doesn't usually bark without any reason. Don't tell me, did something happen to Sylphy-sama's body.....!

"Wau, wau!"

While wagging his tail, he is watching me and the entrance alternatively.

No, that's not it. This happy-go-lucky attitude... If something had happened to Sylphy-sama, he would have cried out.

Towards the entrance.....is it a guest?

No, Leo doesn't wag his tail during a visit by guests.

Ah, it could be that Roxy-sama had returned?

On the occasions Eris-sama returns, Leo shakes his tail, but remains quiet without barking.

While thinking about such things, I raised my back and heard a 'gachari' sound from the entranceway. ^[3]

As I thought, it must be Roxy-sama.

Since Eris-sama opens the door with such force as if to break it.

In order to receive her, I rushed towards the entranceway.

"Ah, Lilia-san, I've just returned."

"Welcome home, Rudeus.....sama?"

The one standing at the door was Rudeus-sama.

Eris-sama and Zenith-sama; Aisha is also there.

But they've returned much earlier than the arranged schedule.

Even though the planned schedule was to stay in Millis for half a year, it's only been approximately one month.

On top of that, Rudeus-sama's facial expression is unusually stern.

I immediately understood at once.

Ah, that something might have happened.

Most probably, Claire-sama would be the cause.

Claire-sama is not too flexible.

To add up, Norn and Aisha as well were somewhat treated bitterly.

Being a pious adherent to Millis, by no means do I think of her as a bad person, but I can't flatter her as a good person either. Her affinity with Rudeus-sama might be the worst.

Most likely, they might have gotten into conflict because of their difference in opinion regarding the family.

"Might something have happened?"

On hearing that, Rudeus-sama's already stern expression warped more.

I thought if it was Rudeus-sama, he might be skillfully able to do it.....either way, a hopeless matter is hopeless.

"....Yeah, well."

Rudeus-sama was prevaricating the words with a halfhearted attitude.

"Is it Claire-sama?"

On hearing that, Rudeus-sama made a blank expression.

"No, I had a fight with Ms. Claire, but we were able to reconcile; I don't think she is a bad person."

With those words, I simultaneously tilted my neck and felt a bit relieved.

Even though I thought that I would become an obstacle if I had gone along, I had been worrying so much for this entire one month; it looks like that was just needless worry.

But then, just what might have happened?

"Then, just what?"

Rudeus-sama made a difficult face and then turned his eyes away.

Aisha is standing with an unpleasant face on his side.

It looks like some kind of different problem has risen up.

Looking at Aisha's complexion, is she the problem?

"Did Aisha make a mistake?"

Just before this, I was consulting about her with Elinalize-sama, but even though this girl is already 15 years old, she still hasn't become quite an adult.

Even though she has the ability, no matter how much time passes, her mind is still that of a child.

Before "A prodigy, with this I'll be able to repay my favor to Rudeus-sama" I would puff my chest out and call her my child, she would remain a (•)prodigy forever.....^[4]

"No, she perfectly made sure of the matters at hand."

"Then, just what?"

I thought in an instant that any more than this would be intrusive, but I still tried to hear it.

"W-well.....it would be good to gather everyone else since it would become a long story if I speak."

"Certainly, I deeply apologize."

"No....ah, but it's not only just bad news, for one thing I also have good news."

While saying that, Rudeus-sama made a forced smile and proceeded towards his room with a quick pace.

Eris-sama went ahead afterwards with an anxious look.

Aisha and Zenith-sama were the only people left.

Aisha was angry, but it looked like Zenith-sama was in a good mood.

"Aisha, were you able to perform firmly?"

".....blundered a little."

That's different.

She isn't mad, but feeling a little down.

That's unexpected.

Aisha is a girl who wouldn't make any thoughtless mistakes since before.

Even if she blunders, she is a child who would get over it after a while.^[5]

That is, if she is informing me with such honesty.....though she's a child, even if I think she is a child, she might have become a little bit more of an adult.

"Is it a serious mistake?"

"No, Onii-chan immediately settled the case."

"....."

Then, just what might have happened.....?

Not to mention Rudeus-sama was making that kind of face.....

No, we'll be speaking afterwards to confer, so let's just wait till then.

Firstly, I must aid Zenith-sama, who just returned.

"....."

As I was thinking that, Zenith-sama turned her face towards me.

And then, while being in a good mood, she extended her arm towards me and came forward.

I grasped that hand and accompanied her to her room.

Part 2

Afterwards, just when the evening was about to pass, all the members of the family gathered.

On Rudeus-sama's command, every member.

At that place, Elinalize-sama was also present along with Norn and Roxy-sama, who just came from the school.

Of course, we usually gather like this whenever Rudeus-sama returns home after a long period.

Still, the number of times Rudeus-sama himself proposes to gather all of us like this are few; he generally considers Aisha or Sylphy-sama's feelings and then finally gathers all members of the family. He does that many times. ^[6]

On top of that, Rudeus-sama's serious face...

Something might have definitely happened.

While putting myself on guard, we heard the report.

"Reporting now, firstly, the activity in Millis came to a close with a success. Cliff was able to skillfully merge into the business. Be relieved."

Claire-sama created a small amount of trouble, but Cliff-sama was able to establish himself in the religious organization just as planned, and the launch of the branch of the mercenary group was also a success.

On top of that, the Millis Organization now owes a huge debt to us, and making Miko-sama a subordinate of Orsted-sama was also a success.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that it was a huge success.

Elinalize-sama gave a sigh of relief after hearing that Cliff had successfully risen himself up in the society.

However, the real problem comes after that.

"Gisu was Hitogami's apostle."

Gisu.

Paul-sama's former party member and a member of the demon race.

It looks like he was the source of trouble this time; he left and vanished after proclaiming a declaration of war at the end.

It struck to no one that Gisu had become an enemy.

He had been socializing together with us since the events of the Begaritto Continent. At that time, he was continuously worried about Paul-sama's and Zenith-sama's health.

Still, his figure doing preparations for the sake of news gathering or labyrinth research was diligent and sincere, or so I remember.

Gisu frantically operated in order to help rescue Roxy-sama.

Having a remarkable ability as a warrior, he encouraged the party members, mapping the area himself as though it was a natural thing to do and then selling the maps; he helped the sad and gloomy Paul, unbeknownst to him.

I can't understand that such a person was acting like that in order to trap Rudeus-sama and Roxy-sama in a bind.

"I was thinking about it since when you contacted me to put him on the wanted list....might it not be some kind of mistake?"

Roxy-sama said so.

With her skill as a labyrinth researcher, she had acknowledged Gisu with only but a glance. That, excluding the area of combat, someone more reliable doesn't exist.

"It would have been nice.....if it was a mistake."

While saying that with a bitter smile, he took out one letter from his breast pocket.

Roxy-sama received that letter and read over the contents, which made her usual sleepy expression cloudy.

However, she immediately understood and accepted it with a nod and passed the letter onto me.

Thereupon, I was finally able to consent to it.

The contents of the letter did seem like Gisu's.

Apart from the goofy nature and jokes, but somewhere, the one who left behind that one slight core was none other than Gisu himself. [7]

He didn't particularly hate Rudeus-sama or Roxy-sama, nor was he trying to trap them from the very beginning.

He may have become an opponent necessary to deal with, but he is not someone who has a grudge towards us; a feeling like that.

"Even though he's usually random; to say Gisu behaves like such a gentlemen occasionally is just like Gisu, isn't it....."

Elinalize-sama spoke while passing a sigh.

Come to think of it, during the old days in the inner palace(reserved for women) of the Asura Kingdom, things like this frequently occurred.

In that country with violent disputes over authority, even though no hate was involved, the occurrences of people becoming each others' mutual enemies were numerous.

It's just that, now that they had become enemies, they had the tendency to fight fair and square.

This letter might have something to comply with such an intention.

"I must apologize to everyone for the matter that we are indebted to Gisu, but I will probably fight with Gisu.....and end up killing him."

While declaring that, Rudeus-sama's face looked awfully painful.

One might not think that, but Rudeus-sama actually acknowledges Gisu as well.

Considering what I heard from Eris-sama, their relationship was good enough to the point that they called themselves out with nicknames like 'Senpai' and 'Newbie'.

Gisu as well, he talked about Rudeus-sama's achievements as his own, and it looks like he had some fondness for him.....

It could be that the one hurt the most is Rudeus-sama himself.

"Rudi...."

Sylphy-sama can't find the words needed to be said after looking at Rudeus-sama's expression.

Roxy-sama is making a stern expression as well.

She's also just like me, who had a personal history of uniting with Gisu's party and receiving assistance.

However, Roxy-sama's decision was too quick; her face doesn't particularly show any hesitation.

Rather, she has a face like, "If Rudeus loses, I will..."

"In any case, I will once again be available in the house for a short while. Even though we have Leo's protection, I don't know what Gisu will try to do.

Everyone should take extreme caution so that danger doesn't befall you."

In the end, Rudeus-sama firmly brought this matter to an end.

Of course, it does not even need to be said; we don't have any intention of becoming Rudeus-sama's weak point.

Rudeus-sama should go into battle with peace of mind; I have the intention of protecting this house while cooperating with the family members and naturally looking after myself. This is one good part of Rudeus-sama; that he always looks back here frequently without sympathizing with that resolution, but he also has a small lonely place when he isn't dependent. ^[8]

Our existence might be seen as somewhat frail on Rudeus-sama's degree.

"I understand Rudi, if Gisu has become an enemy, then tell us what work we can do. If there is something that needs to be done, please give a call out."

"Me too, though I can't move around very well yet, I'll become Rudi's strength."

Roxy-sama and Sylphy-sama are just like before.

The faces of Eris-sama and Aisha displayed agreement as a matter of course.

Norn-sama was feeling a bit uneasy, but ascertained herself with a strong nod.

"Thank you. Tomorrow I will go and consult with Orsted-sama again; for now, let's end this family meeting....."

"Ah, Onii-chan."

While Rudeus-sama was declaring the breakup of the meeting, Aisha called out to him.

"You have to tell them about Zenith-sama as well."

"Ah, that's right."

The matter regarding Zenith-sama.

I could feel my body stiffening up after listening to that.

At the same time, I recalled the mistake Aisha was talking about that I didn't touch upon.

My tension is rising.

However, Rudeus-sama smiled with a puff.

"Actually, the matter regarding mother's curse was made clear."

It looks like it was not a mistake, but good news.

"Her curse allows her to read other people's minds; she can't read all of it, but....she appears to have a precise comprehension about our situation."

After saying that, Rudeus-sama started telling us about what Miko-sama had told him.

From there, the talk shifted towards how Zenith-sama sees this world now.

Listening to that story, tears started spilling over from my eyes.

At the same time, her memories of life up till now have been flowing like surging waves.

Come to think of it, there were lots of times that she showed some ideas.

She took initiative during the garden's maintenance, and when Lucy-sama was very small, it looked like she knew before Lucy would cry and then moved accordingly to precede it.

Moreover, what would this matter be called.....

Zenith-sama actually knows about Paul-sama's matter and understands it.

I thought that she might not know that we had suddenly lost Paul-sama.

I thought that if her memories came back, it would surely be a painful experience for her.

But, Zenith-sama already knew about everything.

On top of that, she had accepted it and was looking forward.

If I think about it, the tears just won't stop.

"Lilia-san....."

"I apologize.....Rudeus-sama...."

Within everyone who was moved to tears, I was the only one who continued to cry out with a 'waaaa' while covering my face.

Recently, I feel like nothing but crying.

Since when I was young, I never cried so much that I would sink in my own tears.

I considered myself as a human who was not moved emotionally by anything.

This must be because of my age.

I kept crying while Aisha patted me on my back,

After some time when I stopped crying, Zenith-sama immediately brushed me gently on my head, and I started crying again.

--- Rudeus's Point of View ---

I finished reporting to my family.

Just like always, it was kind of sufficient; I got a reliable answer.

Particularly, Roxy and Lilia might have some place in their mind about Gisu, but they didn't show any complaint or disapproval, and were in agreement with the fight against Gisu.

President Orsted is the next person to have the staff meeting with.

Even if I say staff, Ariel, Cliff, and Miko are not here, but.....

Still, Sylphy, Roxy, Eris, and Aisha - with these four people, I was sitting with Zanoba to have him make something for me.

While moving with the horse-drawn carriage that is owned by the Mercenary Group, I picked up Zanoba in the middle and am now on my way to the office.

"Then, Zanoba, I'll be relying on you about the matter concerning the Magic Armor."

Along the way, we were planning about the powering up of the Magic Armor.

Resuming development of 『Mk. III』 .

One more thing to add to that is the matter of the preparation of a trump card. After watching my Magic Armor, Gisu might come up with something; I want to add measures on this side for once as well.

"I understand Master, since the amount of workers has recently increased here, it might just be possible."

"In that case, let me help you out as well."

While listening to my plan, I entrusted Zanoba, who was striking his chest.

The one who cut in our conversation was none other than Roxy.

"I have also been increasing my knowledge regarding magic battle formations; I think I can assist you on that."

An assistant, huh?

Certainly I would be grateful, but is it ok?

Honestly, its construction and maintenance is very complex to the point that even I am not able to do it sometimes.

"Is it really fine? ...I think it's too difficult to just dabble in."

"Geez, Rudi, just who do you think you're facing towards and inquiring with?"

"S-sorry, that was rude of me!"

I recovered the balance of my mind! ^[9]

Even though there is no such thing that Roxy-sensei isn't capable of doing!

Just what am I saying?

I am a foolish guy! Good grief, it would have been good if I died!

"Even I have been continuously studying for Rudi's sake.

I could help out with the maintenance and improvement after looking at Zanoba's or Cliff's research papers....."

"Sensei....."

Come to think of it, she was depicted as a Fire Saint Class in Magic in Shirone, right.....?

It was not because she was able to do that in the former days; it could be that doing Magic training after coming back from Magic University might have given out results.

"I understand. I'll let you look after the Magic Armor and entrust my life to sensei!"

"Entrust it to me."

I was thinking that the Magic Armor's progress would not advance much further since Cliff is not here; it's a pleasant miscalculation.

If Roxy made the Armor, it would be tremendously strong.

Even if the raw materials only consist of cardboard, perhaps it would be able to crush three Orsted's put in order? ^[10]

"Don't underestimate me like that just because Cliff is not here."

While saying that, Roxy puffed her breasts.

Looks like she has self-confidence in this. If that's the case, then the plan for improvement may also become true.

"Hahaha, I just can't match up to master's master!"

With Zanoba's single sentence, the entirety of the carriage was wrapped up with laughter.

"....."

Inside it was an unexpectedly quiet character.

It's Eris.

While deep in thought, she is looking outside the window.

Eris might also be recalling the things regarding Gisu.

Eris said one thing or another and fairly got emotionally attached to Gisu after meeting by chance with him in the Great Forest.

There is also the memory of her getting taught cooking by him.

Eris's compatibility with various people is poor; Gisu was someone who matched her rhythm.

".....?"

Sylphy, who was sitting next to me suddenly grasped my arm tightly.

"Rudi, you alright?"

".....Eh? Ah, I'm alright."

I didn't quite get in what way or how I'm alright, but for now I gave that answer.

The matter regarding Gisu was a big shock, but still it's alright.

Sylphy's stomach has also increased a little bit from before.

It was discovered that she was 3 months pregnant; it's been 1 month since then, so estimating some more time, it can be assumed that she's more or less 5 months in.

"What about Sylphy?"

"Unlike others, I was not particularly acquainted with Gisu, so..."

"I see."

That was not something I was expecting to hear, but I guess it's fine if that topic is not touched upon.

She might have some composure because there is a second person.

However, caution is advised.

A long time ago, Hitogami also said that.

Something about how fate becomes ambiguous during pregnancy, so it becomes easier to kill women with strong fate.

The fact Hitogami said that remains, so a Demon Beast was summoned for protection on Orsted's advice.

That's why it should be fine, but as I thought, some anxiety still remains.

What to do?

I want one more relief ingredient.

If there is something that can be done...

I think I'll be able to do something.

Ah.

"I think until Gisu is dealt with, we should stop doing erotic things."

I thought the words that came out of my mouth weren't mine.

Sylphy was staring in puzzlement, Roxy with a gaping mouth, and Eris was doing side-long glances; all three of them respectively looked at me.

"Ummm.....if Rudi wants that, I don't mind?"

"I don't mind, but.....do you want to have a Buddhist prayer?" ^[11]

"I might have mentioned this before, but it's easier for Hitogami to aim at us during pregnancy. Gisu might also be aiming for that, so let's stop for a short while."

They look like they've heard that for the first time.

Did I not tell them about it before?.....

I told them, but they might've forgotten.

"It can't be helped."

It looked like Eris was discontent, but she didn't object.

She muttered that while returning her gaze back to the window.

"But I don't think Rudeus will be able to abide by that promise."

That's a bitter comment.

I don't have much confidence in the lower half of my body.

I am untrustworthy.

I might be calm right now, but it's the male instinct to shoot when the bullet is loaded.

And then, if the firing hammer is cocked, I'll probably shoot if it's now or never.

"I don't think even Sylphy would be able to reject."

"Uuuu.....even I will be able to uphold it if that's what Rudi wants."

"No way. Rudi will say 'just a little,' and then you'll allow it while saying 'if it's just a little', right?"

".....I'll probably allow it."

That might be possible if I just feel them up. If I can at least hug them to replenish my energy.....

'Just a little' - that feeling is fatal.

"That's why I will always stay beside Rudi, and if he tries to do something, I'll hit him."

If I try to do something erotic.

Eris will hit me.

I'll lose consciousness. And forget about it by the time I wake up.

It's perfect.

"I'll be in your care."

Alright, from today onwards I am the abstinent Rudeus.

Be strong.

Part 3

We arrived at the office.

If you look at the place, it emits a strange atmosphere like that of a Devil King's castle; Orsted seems to relax here without the helmet when he makes a stay.

No, it's wrong to just arbitrarily decide only on the atmosphere.

Perhaps, it might not be.....ah, just now, I had a hunch that the atmosphere softened. Thought so, it's here.

"Ah, President Rudeus! Adviser Aisha! Thanks for your hard work!"

The instant we entered, a young woman sitting in the lobby vigorously bowed to us.

A women who is a half between the human race and long-eared race(elf-race).

She might have the long-lived blood of the long-eared race, but she's still quite young.

She's Orsted's secretary, who was hand-picked from the many candidates that were carefully screened repeatedly.

She stays here throughout the daytime and devotes herself to office work, communicating with Orsted by exchange of words without accidentally meeting him, who sits inside the room.

What was her name again?

"Thank you for your hard work. Is the President present?"

"Yes, he has been staying in the room since this last month."

For 1 month, that means he's been staying there for almost the entire time since I've been to Millis.

It looks like he's not out of the office much recently.

It gives off the feeling of a shut-in.

No, he might have seen the situation of my house.

According to the Miko's observation of Zenith's memories, he visited quite a number of times.....

"But, if I am the Chairman and Orsted-sama is the Company President, then it feels like my authority is sort of greater than him."

"Huh.....then, what should I call you?"

What would be good?

If Rinia is the leader, Aisha the advisor, and if we assume I am the Chairman.....

"Commander-in-Chief.....or something like that?"

".....Should I comply with that?"

"That's right, umm, I look forward to working with you."

Anyhow, it looks like we're done with her ignorance.

Any big problems have not risen up till now.

Her wages were settled with a boost as well and she might be tolerant about the amount.

"Are there any problems besides that?"

"No, there are none."

"Is that so? If there are any complaints, immediately say them; we'll grant the request as soon as possible."

"....Eh!?"

She got surprised.

Why was she surprised?

Certainly we don't have any Labor Standards Act, but we surely intend to become a white company. ^[12]

"I apologize. I ended up saying that because Orsted-sama talks like that."

"Ah, is that so....."

"We have already gained a lot of convenience."

Even if it's usually indirect and such a suggestion is done, one would put himself on guard if it's a contract with the devil itself.

It's only thanks to the helmet Cliff made which alleviated Orsted's curse.

I wonder if it's fine.

"Even though I am much obliged, it's a pity that I can't even look at his face."

"It's because of his curse. The moment you see his face, the feeling that you're getting now would probably be changed to resentment or suspicion or the like."

"That's a rather dreadful thing."

"Yeah. That's why, you must never open the door^[13] when Orsted is working inside."

".....Be-bedding?" ^[14]

"Ahem."

Well, it should be fine if he'd put the helmet on at that time.

Even Orsted wouldn't put it on at all times.

"In any case, I'll be making use of the conference room now."

"I understand."

I passed the office worker and opened the door.

Part 4

Orsted was as usual, writing in a book on his desk.

With the helmet equipped.

"Rudeus, is it?"

"I have just returned."

When I bowed to greet, Orsted closed his bulky leather notebook with a snap.

"What were you writing about today?"

"The same, information sorting."

"Is that right?"

I tried to take a peek in that notebook once when Orsted wasn't around, but it was written in Dragon Race language, so I wasn't able to read it.

One would think that it contains necessary information, since Orsted doesn't usually tell me about important things.

Having said that, if it is something like a diary, then it would be like trespassing his privacy.....

"Were you not immediately leaving for the Kingdom of the Dragon King?"

"Before that, I would like to revise this time's report in the meeting hereafter."

"I have already informed you over the Lithograph; there is nothing else more from me to tell you."

"I expected to come back, and since our movements will change from now on, it's my obligation to report."

"...I see."

Orsted said that with a sigh and reseated himself on the chair.

I told the 5 people that I bought along with to sit on the chairs and then sat myself.

"Why bring them along?"

"I am concerned about Gisu's people, so just in case. I also wanted your opinion, so..."

On taking a glance at those five people, the girls looked demure.

The straightforward hostility isn't there like before.

Eris is almost displeased.

"Then, make it brief."

I cleared my throat with a cough.

"We've already discussed this over the Lithograph, but it looks like Gisu is assembling war potential to kill me from right in front.

We don't know whether it's true or not, but I am considering assembling strong comrades of our own to oppose them."

"Yeah."

"Firstly, we need to call dibs on Death God in the Kingdom of the Dragon King and then Atofe; after that we'll think about the North God.....are you aware of North God's whereabouts?

After Atofe, I intend to call out at least the upper positions from the Seven Major World Powers.

Rank #5 『Death God』 .

Rank #6 『Sword God』 .

Rank #7 『North God』 .

They're arranged in this order, but prior to the meeting with Orsted, it was likely that it would be easier to call out to North God.

That is why North God would be given preference over Sword God.

"I don't know. Those guys are wanderers. Just a little alteration in history and they end up at the opposite sides of the world. The distinction can't be gripped with this many changes."

"How does it look like usually?"

"Second Gen North God in the Begaritto Continent and Third Gen North God ought to be in the Strife Zone in the Central Continent."

Both of them are too far, and it doesn't seem like there is a landmark for them. Then that means it would be better to give up on the North God.

"If war is that important, Ore God would be a nice installment later on. That guy can mass-produce good quality armor if he gets accustomed to the war, but has a weak point when it comes to fighting himself."^[15]

"Understood. Then, next would be Sword God."

For now, the sequential order is Death God, Atofe, and Sword God.....

I want to call out to even more various people.

For example, the Seven Major World Powers' ranking superiors.....

At the top of the Seven Major World Powers is 『Technique God』 , 『Dragon God』 , 『Fighting God』 , and 『Demon God』 in sequential order.

Other than the Dragon God, the others are missing or sealed, was it like that? Huh?

"Which reminds me, won't Technique God become our ally? Certainly, there is the matter regarding him split into two and Demon God, but won't he cooperate if he hears about our fight with Hitogami?"

"Futile."

"Because of his memories being vague? Then, let's just work out how to restore Demon God Laplace's true spirit back by combining him.....ah, but if we do that, Perugius-sama will get angry. But, that piece is appetizing....."

"Stop it."

With those powerful words I held my tongue.

"I don't have any intention of becoming those guys' comrade."

Those guys.

I somehow understood with those words.

Orsted sees Laplace and Perugius as the same rank as him.

Probably not just those two, the rest as well; similarly, those people who are known as the Five Dragon Generals.

".....But then, ummmm, Perugius-sama won't stay silent if it's something relevant to Laplace, right?"

"If they become enemies, then I'll deal with them."

".....I understand."

I can more or less guess why he's so obstinate.

Orsted's curse won't be effective against Perugius.

Despite the curse' effectiveness, Orsted will not become friends with Perugius.

An obstinate refusal.

The derived answers are not too many.

However, I hesitated to ask the reason.

For some reason, I can't ask.

It's impossible to ask now.

『The 『Treasures of the Dragon Tribe』 that lead to Hitogami's place, are those the life force of the Five Dragon Generals?』

If I end up asking that, it feels like Perugius or Orsted will become enemies.

As of now, the unknown matter must be put in advance.

"Well then.....let's talk about it some other time."

"Yeah."

I decided to change the subject.

It's not a good thing if I persist the matter unreasonably even though it's in vain.

Since I can say with confidence that I am his subordinate, I must abide by his decisions as well.

"I received quite some influence during this one case, but I didn't have enough stuff like a little bit of Orsted-sama's 『influence』 , so I have a preposition."

".....What is it?"

"Although I got used to calling myself 『Dragon God's Right Hand』 , but even now there are people who don't feel frightened or how should I put this, there are still many who don't yet understand just how frightening 『Dragon God』 is, that is why....."

Would it be fine to just pick up an easier title like 『Dragon King』 ?

A very appropriate title like Mud Dragon King would be fine....."

Well, it's just a name.

Orsted's popularity is low, but Perugius is famous.

It's the same rank as that Perugius, and such a really amazing thing will be easy to circulate if you think about it.

"No good."

Huh?

"There are many who call themselves the Dragon King."

He is glaring at me.

A terrifying glare.

I can comprehend the anger beyond that helmet.

What is this? Danger, danger, my feet are shivering.

"They live as they please with that tiny pride of theirs and die because of a foolish enemy."

"....."

"But you are different. Therefore, don't call yourself that. Rudeus Greyrat."

"Ah....um....yes."

It was unexpected.

That he would so strongly reject it.

I thought he would say 'You can freely name yourself'.

Not good, my trembling isn't stopping.

"Tch....."

"Eris, stop it!"

While I stopped Eris who was trying to come forward before, she clicked her tongue.

It's alright. It's not a fight. It's not a discord.

I just made the President a little bit angry by saying the exact opposite about his management policies.

So please stop rising your back while gripping your hand.

"That was an obtruded preposition. I'm very sorry."

"I don't mind."

After I bowed, the anger vanished.

Apart from his premise of moving through his loops, even Orsted has things that he can't concede to.

I seem to have stepped there thoughtlessly.

I don't really care; something like a nickname, it doesn't matter, anything is fine.

Something like authority, I can just put that in any other part as many times as I like.

For example.....something like borrowing Ariel's, Asura Kingdom's authority.

Alright, let's go in that direction.

"Well then, apart from receiving Ariel's authority somehow or other.....who should we find to make a comrade after Sword God?"

".....Perhaps Biheilir country. Fierce God lives there."^[16]

Fierce God.

Someone like that exists?

"Is it fine to make him a comrade?"

"No, I investigated that guy thoroughly; he's a person who has a high possibility of becoming an apostle. If Gisu is recruiting him as a soldier, then it should be fine to just crush him."

Crush them to forestall it.

I see. That method also exists.

Increase this side's pawns and decrease that side's pawns.

In order to not fight with all 5 people in one go, a method to crush each and every person.

"Are there any others who can become possible enemies?"

"Let's see.....with the exception of Fierce God, there aren't many important people..... 『Hades』 Vita who lives in the Heaven Continent's labyrinth 『Hell』 . The Demon Continent's 『Unpleasant Demon King』 Kebura Kabura; it would be fine to crush both of them.

Also, it's fine to choose the former as the last if you're proceeding in this direction, since it's just small quantity of bones."

"I see."

Those are some terrific names.

Would it be fine to just not fight them.....

They just have a 『high』 probability of becoming Hitogami's apostle.

Presently, we don't know anything as of yet.

They haven't yet become apostles.

Then, wouldn't it be fine to make them a comrade before that?

It's not like we won't be able to escape an urgent problem without making some sacrifice.^[17]

It's fine to just fight at that time if it's unnatural.

I mean, if I go around killing companions who don't even know how they are related is... I don't want that.

"Well then, I'll be taking the method of making them into comrades or neutralizing them."

"That is right."

For the present, it's been settled what to do about who.

Next time will be details.

"Then, on to the next topic. It's about the visit to the Kingdom of the Dragon King----"

After that, we concentrated on the preparation to go to KDK and gave that situation a closure.

Still, I hadn't thought that he would get so angry when I mentioned about the Dragon Race. I'll be careful from next time.

Chapter 2

Death God's Worries

Part 1

Kingdom of the Dragon King.^[18]

This kingdom can only be described as unorganized.

The heights of the buildings aren't uniform, and the people are all dressed irregularly.

There was no attempt at city planning; an adventurer's inn was built right next to what looks like a noble's mansion.

A Sword God Style dojo was built right across from a North God Style dojo.

But even if there's no impression of unity, it is a vibrant place.

There's no history of social castes.

This is a country built on meritocracy and imperialism.^[19]

After arriving in such a country, naturally I went straight to the Royal Palace... Not really.

"Since we have no social standing here, we can't move using authority."

That's what I learned in Milis.

When dealing with a government, I need to make myself known so I'm not taken lightly.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

... Although it's a little different this time, I need to act and make preparations accordingly.

Therefore, we're heading to the embassy.

What embassy?

Of course, it's the Kingdom of Asura's embassy.

Ariel is a major shareholder in our company.

So naturally the Kingdom of Asura is a backer for the Orsted Corporation.

No, wouldn't it be the opposite?...

Orsted is backing the Kingdom of Asura.

Well, at any rate, borrowing the Kingdom of Asura's influence will ensure things won't turn out as poorly as they did in Milis.

I'll borrow a formal set of clothes and a carriage from the embassy,

Then head to the palace with a letter bearing Ariel's royal seal.

Of course, I sent Ariel a copy of my directive and received permission.

She responded [In the case of a decisive battle, you can count me among your war potential.]

Over the past several years, she seems to have been reinforcing her war potential and solidifying her position.

If I asked for something like bodyguards, she could probably set me up with some.

Well, I don't know about their strength, or how useful they'd be...

"...."

After confirming the situation, it seems that the embassy only has one room for us to change in.

"Aisha, if you like any of the outfits, you can bring them back home with us, so choose quickly. Eris is waiting."

"Hnn... Onii-chan, I can't decide... After all, I wonder if a green outfit is best? Eris-ane is wearing red, brother is wearing gray..."

Aisha has been prowling around in her underwear, unable to decide on an outfit since earlier.

By all accounts she's definitely a woman, taking this long to choose an outfit.

Because Aisha requested [I want you to decide, Onii-chan], Maid-san gave me a criticizing look while I stayed to watch Aisha change.

However, despite asking me to decide, it doesn't seem like she's really leaving the decision to me.

Even if I suggest something, it'll just end up as [No, that clashes with Eris-ane] and we'll end up looking for something else.

Last time, her maid clothes were troublesome.

Therefore, there's no objection to wearing a more proper outfit... but for it to take this long...

A frilly, light three-piece dress.

Since I've been surrounded by people who don't spend much time on preparations, this is new, but as I expected, it's tiring.

"I mean, I shouldn't be the center of attention, so should I maybe choose something plainer?"

"No, even if it's flashy it's fine. Yeah, your cuteness would even stun the Death God."

"Answer seriously!"

I got scolded.

But, seriously.

It wouldn't be strange for Aisha to meet a man in such a place.

She might catch the eye of a noble boy in the Royal Palace, and it would be something like a Cinderella story!

I'd like to see that.

It would be troublesome if she brought home someone strange...

Aisha has said it herself, the job this time isn't really job-like, and she's free to love whoever she wants anyway.

"Well then, wear the dark green one. It's plain enough, and it will match Eris's dress?"

"Eh... that skirt is a bit short... it would show too much leg."

Well, it should be fine.

Although I want to say that, Maid-san jumps in and says [Then that's no good], and discards the dress.

"Uu..."

With a groan, Aisha returned to picking out a dress.

Well, seeing her in her underwear, she's growing into a healthy adult.

She's growing in the appropriate places.

Apparently our family has the [nice body] gene.

The kind that attracts bad insects during the day.

Zenith and Lilia are also like that,

And Paul's family, the Notos Greyrats, love big breasts.

Therefore, my grandmother must have also had a huge chest back in the day.

It's hereditary.

"... Hey, Onii-chan."

"Hmm?"

"Uffun~nano."

Suddenly, Aisha bent slightly at the waist and struck a pose with her hands behind her head.

I've definitely seen that somewhere before.

"Who taught this to you?"

"Pursena. If I do it like this, she said it would be an instant knockout."

"That's not right. Using her pose right now can only be considered a misfire... You shouldn't have so much faith in her advice."

"Eeh...! But it was really popular in the mercenary group...!"

"Don't joke around, please choose quickly."

Although we still have a bit of time, we should hurry.

Today's appointment is a meeting with Princess Benedict and her knight Randolph.^[20]

They aren't particularly busy either; it's my understanding that they're free all day today.

So we can relax until the afternoon.

I don't think he'll turn into an enemy in the span of an hour.

It's not my motto to wait until the last minute to do things.

Having a bit of flexibility is always valuable.

We should be mindful of the time. We have enough leeway.

"Slow!"

However, people that are always in a rush also exist.

One such fellow just threw the door open with a *bang* and jumped into the room.

It's Eris.

In a glittering red coat, wearing black pants.

She also has her hair done in a ponytail in the style of the Kingdom of Dragon King's nobility.

She looks like an awe-inspiring female swordsman.

But, well, this is actually a style reserved for men.

According to Maid-san, it's considered inappropriate to carry a sword in a dress, so she immediately decided on this outfit.

"You're taking forever to choose!"

"Ah, Eris-ane. Sorry. I can't decide."

"Fuu..."

She quickly walked over to Aisha, her bright red hair trailing behind her.

Then grabbed one of the dresses arranged for us.

A bright, wine red dress.

"Take this!"

"Huh, but, Eris-ane is the one wearing red."

"What, you don't want to match with me!?"

"No, that's not it; I shouldn't attract that much attention because I'm an assistant. Shouldn't Eris-ane stand out more?"

"You're not an assistant! As my younger sister, wear something good!"

Aisha blushed at Eris's speech.

Then laughed with a [hehe] and received the dress.

"If Eris-ane insists, I'll wear this."

She seemed a little happy about it.

I wonder if she was happy that Eris referred to her as her younger sister.

I don't really understand a girl's mind well.

Thus, Aisha determined her dress, and we proceeded to Kingdom of Dragon King's Royal Palace.

Part 2

The Kingdom of Dragon King's Royal Palace.

It's not as large as Asura Kingdom's Royal Palace, or as refined as Milis.

To describe it in a few words, it was a bloated jumble of buildings with bizarre landscaping. It seems they've been constantly adding on to the main building out of necessity, but it just oozes vulgarity.

Nevertheless, this is the result.

It had the nature of something overwhelmingly unknown.

If I had to invade this palace, I don't think I could help but hesitate.

Although there's no need to feel overwhelmed this time.

I'm well prepared.

I'm in a carriage drawn by a white horse, in beautiful clothes, with an appointment.

Furthermore, Orsted has a good grasp on the present and future situation of this country.

It might not be perfect, but it makes a big difference.

I have confidence that things won't get carried away.

"Then, Eris, Aisha, are you ready?"

"Yeah."

"Yup."

By the way, this time it's only us three.

Eris, Aisha, and myself.

"If the Death God turns out to be an enemy, Eris and I will stall him, and, Aisha, you spread the [Complete Set] summoning scroll. Then I'll settle things in the MK-I."

"Leave it to me!"

I actually wanted to bring Zanoba and Roxy, but they have their hands full with the MK-III's production.

For the present, it's just us.

Eris and I are the combat force.

Well, that's only in the case that the Death God turns into an enemy.

I'll entrust Eris to the vanguard.

That's why it's necessary to bring two people, in order to deal with such an unpredictable guy.

Although, putting that line of thought aside, it's also important for Aisha to join us in preparation for installing a mercenary branch in this country.

It's not a bad thing to get a feeling for the country in person.

"..."

While we were having that dangerous conversation, we arrived at the palace's gates.

There's nothing for me to say here.

The person that came with us from Asura Kingdom's embassy does all the talking.

From arranging the appointment to addressing the gatekeeper, and all the arrangements afterwards.

Everything has gone smoothly so far, and now we've entered the palace.

"We have arrived."

We disembark the horse-drawn carriage and are guided into the palace.

After all this, I'm starting to feel conspicuous.

A person wearing what looks to be noble attire chatting with a knight was staring.

"Act dignified."

This time, in addition to coming here in the position of Benedict's friend, I've also made it clear that I've come here with Ariel's authority.

To make an enemy of me is for the Kingdom of Dragon King to make an enemy of the Kingdom of Asura,

There might also be rumors floating around of my involvement with the war in Shirone.

It shouldn't be possible for anyone to know that Orsted was the criminal who killed the king.

After this, I'll be in Ariel's debt again.

Part 3

We were guided through the palace to a simple room.

It was a small room, with a minimum number of maids in attendance.

"Greetings, it's been awhile. Rudeus-dono."

And it seems the guards are at the maximum.

The Death God Randolph Marian.

He stood there like a demon, with Benedict as his master, protecting the infant in her arms.

"...."

Benedict looked at me, with her mouth tightly shut, and held her crying child.

I decided to greet her before Randolph.

That seems like the appropriate thing to do.

"Benedict-sama, I see you are in good health."

"...."

No reply.

But, there may be no helping it.

She probably heard various things back then,

About Zanoba and I, from Pax.

I don't expect Pax spoke very well of us.

"Your son also appears to be in good health. Zanoba will be glad."

"....."

"Hmm? Or is it a daughter?"

Benedict slowly shook her head.

I seem to have been correct, it's a boy.

"Could I ask for his name...?"

"..... Pax."

"He received the name of his father, Pax II."

Randolph supplemented.

So he has the same name as his father.

Pax Junior, I'll call you Little Pax.

I see. That's good.

"...."

"Err... Ah, that's right. Today let me introduce my wife and younger sister."

"I am... Eris Greyrat."

"I am Aisha Greyrat. Happy to meet you."

Awkward Eris and charming Aisha.

Perhaps because they're both wearing red, they look like sisters.

That's not it, they are sisters.

Sister-in-law Aisha.

"....."

Benedict doesn't respond.

She only looks up at Randolph anxiously.

"But Rudeus-dono, I had heard that your wife was from the demon race?"

Thus, Randolph responded.

Since his master refuses to speak, he responded; that seems a little rude.

"I have three wives. That would be Roxy."

"My goodness... That must not have a good affinity with the Milis religion."

"My priest friend preaches to me about it whenever possible."

I turned to Randolph.

"Long time no see. Randolph-san."

His appearance hasn't changed at all.

That sullen skeleton-like face.

At first glance he seems to be full of openings, but that's false.

Looking at Eris's pouting face, I understood that.

"You seem to be doing well."

"Yup, very. I'm full of spirit. Rudeus-dono doesn't seem to be doing so well though."

"A short time ago, an acquaintance turned into an enemy."

"I understand. When I was younger, I had to cut down a friend; it troubled me deeply."

Randolph responded, while sneaking a glance at Eris.

While nodding, he slightly moved to position himself between Benedict and Eris.

"Eris, could you take a few steps back?"

"Why."

"Randolph-san seems to have difficulty talking like this."

Eris had moved to put Randolph inside her range.

While Randolph had been moving little by little to block with me.

The two warriors were each trying to out-manuever the other, which took the shape of them each slowly moving opposite each other in a slow arc.^[21]

If I left things like this, when they each reached their optimal position, a fight would probably break out.

"But, this guy might also be an enemy."

"If he was an enemy, he wouldn't have let Eris in this room with her sword."

Even more so, he definitely wouldn't have brought Benedict here.

He wouldn't bring what he most wanted to protect to a fight with a magician and a Sword King.

He would probably ambush us alone, or maybe with a group.
Since Benedict was in this room, Randolph was not my enemy.

But if this Benedict is a body double, then in that case...
I'd like to think he would have come up with a better trap.
If I try to anticipate everything, the possibilities of being deceived are endless.
For now, let's assume this isn't a trap, and regard this as a tentative trust.

"... Understood."

Eris reluctantly stepped back towards the entrance.
But now she was gripping her sword.

"Thank you very much, Rudeus-dono."^[22]

"No, I must apologize, please forgive me. However, this room is a little crowded..."

"What about your friend's story? Should I ask?"

"Of course. That's why I've come."

I spoke about what had happened in the Holy Kingdom of Milis.
And how the demon race man named Gisu turned into my enemy.
Although Gisu has no combat capabilities, he's very resourceful.
And that Hitogami plans to use him as a mouthpiece to recruit war potential.
In order to thwart Gisu, I've had him put on the wanted list in each country, and have started moving to create a counter-force.

"Really, to come out directly and declare war."

"He didn't have a particularly good hand to play."^[23]

"No, no, rather I meant that as a compliment. If you break through their tricks head on, one by one, then even the smart ones will run out of bright ideas."

Randolph let out some kind of rattling laugh at that.

I guess he's speaking from his own experience.

Those from the immortal demon race seem to be skilled in that regard.

"Well, that's why. So by all means, I want to borrow your power."

"Although I'd like to help by all means, I have no reason to do so. Furthermore, I don't want to get involved with Hitogami."

"... Even if Hitogami was his Majesty Pax's enemy?"

"Hou, what's this now? Please tell me in more detail."

I explained how Shirone was dragged into Hitogami's scheme.

And who was an apostle.^[24]

After Randolph listened to the last, he just laughed.

An eerie [kukuku] laugh that stretched the skin over his skeleton-like cheekbones.

"If that's the case, then don't mind what I'd said, I very much want to avenge his Majesty and destroy his enemy..."

Randolph said that while still laughing.

The first thing I think of seeing that ghastly face is [Treachery], but it's not good to judge people by their face.

All in all, everything's gone smoothly.

At this rate...

"And, there's something I want to say as well... but it's a little crowded here."

Whoops, it doesn't look like this is going as smoothly as I thought.

"What is it?"

"Nufufu, weren't we on opposing sides just a little while ago?"

Saying that so confidently, I'm starting to feel cornered.

But this might just be a friendly conversation for Randolph...

"You have the upper hand, please speak your mind."

"There is a condition. Do you still want to borrow my power?"

He certainly has the upper hand. In this situation, I can only listen to his demands.

Well, what kind of unreasonable demand will I be stuck with?

Or, this might be a ploy by Gisu.

"No, it's not a big deal."

Randolph took a step back.

From his position defending Benedict, as if to reveal her.

Benedict holding her baby.

She looks frightened for some reason.

"Although I suspect all of you are already aware, this country is in a state of chaos."

Kingdom of Dragon King is indeed in a state of chaos.

After Hitogami's plot in Shrivone Kingdom was revealed, Orsted killed the king of the Dragon King's Kingdom.

Be that as it may, the late king had his affairs in order beforehand, and had properly chosen a successor.

The next generation king took control immediately, and the Kingdom of Dragon King has begun to regain stability.

But, that's merely the official story.

They still don't know who killed the late king.

Whether or not it was another country that assassinated him.

Or even if it was a member of the imperial court.

The perpetrator aside, they don't even know the purpose.

This has torn apart any semblance of unity in the imperial court,

Those gripped by paranoia can't properly function as a government.

"The chaos itself, is not directly related to us... The Queen's child is now considered a hindrance."^[25]

After all, Randolph's primary concern is Pax's son.

Benedict is the daughter of the previous king.

Although she was not treated as such,

And was eventually given to Prince Pax of Shirone to get rid of her.

Well, whatever.

The useless princess was finally put to use. That's all.

But, since the prince died in the civil war, now that Benedict has had his child, it's a different story.

The troops that took control of the Kingdom of Shirone have been steadily rebuilding the country.

Although they can't do anything right now...

However, they still hold a grudge against Pax.

After all, Pax massacred the royal family.

"Personally, before Shirone is rebuilt, I expect that it will be swallowed by the North, but there seem to be a lot of people feeling uneasy about it..."

Because of the royal family's lineage, things have become troublesome.

In a country like Shirone, one with the royal bloodline has the right to become king.

So, for those who currently control Shirone, the fact that Pax's son has survived is something undesirable.

If the Kingdom of Shirone stabilizes in a few more years, they will definitely demand Benedict's child.

In the future, the Kingdom of Dragon King and Shirone Kingdom will likely want to remain on friendly terms.

Little Pax is still the late king's grandson.

Shirone is a vassal state, so such a request would insult the country's honor.

Still, relations with Shirone would only deteriorate if they wouldn't submit.

That's why there seems to be some movement to 'remove' the concern beforehand.

In other words, to kill Little Pax before the request is made.

That way both the Kingdom of Dragon King and Shirone Kingdom keep face.

However, Randolph's presence wouldn't allow that.

"Wouldn't the Death God Randolph stand in the way of that?"

"Many people seem to think that fighting me is a better alternative to going to war with another country."

Well, I guess it would be like that.

Currently, while the Kingdom of Dragon King is in a state of internal chaos, its vassal states have been attacked by other countries.

In such a state, if Shirone, their northern breakwater, becomes an enemy...

It would only be natural for people to feel anxious.

Although from my perspective, Randolph is a much worse enemy.

"As long as I'm here, assassins and the like are meaningless. The way things are going, regarding the child's future... what do you say?"

Even if he survives the assassination attempts, all that's waiting are custody requests from Shirone.

No matter how things play out, a peaceful life does not await Little Pax.

"... If that's the case, even assuming I found a resolution, then it would still be impossible to bring Randolph-san to the final battle with Gisu."

"Yup, it's impossible... However, isn't an ally in the Kingdom of Dragon King necessary?"

"..."

"Having me as an ally will be very reassuring. Everyone says I am reliable."

"I suppose."

Randolph won't participate in the next fight.

But, on the other hand, that means he won't be an enemy allying with Gisu.

He won't be an ally or enemy.

However that doesn't mean he's worthless as a piece.

As he said, even if I can't take him to fight Gisu, it will be reassuring to have collaborators in Kingdom of Dragon King.

Even if it's ten or twenty years later, he might become a linchpin.

It's a future investment.

Orsted Corporation is a company that looks towards the future.

"I understand. Then, I will manage somehow."

Anyhow, our company's president was the cause of this mess in the first place.

That's a match pump.^[26]

"Yep, best regards."

And with that, it looks like I've come to an understanding with the Death God...

Chapter 3

King of the Dragon King's Kingdom

Part 1

After my meeting with Randolph, I went back to the Embassy at once.

And thus, once again, we decided to do formalities for the audience with the present King.

I am currently assessed as the Dragon God's subordinate, Ariel's friend, Randolph's friend, and Benedict's friend in the Kingdom of the Dragon King(KDK).

Whether they will allow an audience with the king of a large country or not...

I expected it to be a difficult line, but unexpectedly we easily got permission for audience.

"Rudeus-dono has been quite popular here recently, so it's obvious."

Or so someone at the Embassy said.

I don't have any personal experience, but certainly the number of unknown people that are aware of my name are numerous.

I want you to forgive me for becoming so popular that it's becoming difficult to move, but it's a merit in itself that I was able to manage a smooth audience in a place like this.

Let that be sufficient for now.

"It's obvious if it's Rudeus."

"No, elder sister Eris, if it's the King of one of the best countries, then you can't just meet someone like that. You have to rely on someone if it's that."

"As expected of Rudeus!"

Eris is the same as usual.

Part 2

Several days later, I made my attendance in the castle and turned up at the audience room of the Dragon King's castle.

Although I am not boasting, I am a little fussy regarding audience rooms.

Asura Kingdom, Shirone Kingdom, Kishirika Castle....be it be an audience room of any castle, some kind of intrusion always happens.

The audience room is made out of vanity.

It has a vast space with magnificent ornaments and sometimes knights wearing silver ^[27] armor standing in a line can be seen, a place where people show off their power to each other by talking about how great their country is or how awesome their king is.

That is the audience room.

Asura Kingdom is a magnificent place with its spaciousness and splendor.

The audience room of Asura Kingdom is spacious with numerous people and gives off a dazzling impression.

It's probably because it's time for Ariel's coronation that the castle is always in a state of decoration.

Vastness, personnel, condition of expenses, throne, the beauty of the person sitting on the throne.

Any of those things are of first-class quality.

But, I'll say it clearly.

Asura Kingdom's audience room was certainly wonderful.

However, it ranks second in the world.

It's not only just the audience room.

I'm distributing my evaluation over the regular route until one reaches the audience room. Outside the castle, despite a garden of excellent quality and lined up articles of fine arts that are a delight to visitors' eyes, I didn't meet anyone along the way.

A corridor that continues to be peaceful without a noise.

With a forceful lift in tension, the visitor feels a solemn atmosphere.
And the gigantic doors that lead towards the audience room.
The room that can't even be flattered upon its splendor is waiting before it's open.
With the minimum necessity for it, the decoration is simple.
Furthermore, 12 knights are lined up in front of the throne.
Every one of them is wearing a mask and throwing an overpowering intimidation by not revealing their identities, which in itself feels plain.

All of these are measures to give more attention to the throne.
The one sitting on the throne is the only person not wearing a mask.
That overwhelming feeling of a subtle and elegant existence.....just who would make light of such a mood?
Where is it?
Why hide it? It's the Sky Fortress [Chaos Breaker].
1st in rank is the Dragon King Perugius.
I didn't notice it before, but all of those came from production.
It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Perugius's taste is the best in the world.

"Oh!"

It was me who gave out a voice of astonishment while observing the audience room of the KDK.

This country's audience room slightly differed from that of Asura's or Chaos Breaker's.

It was a little rough at best.

First of all, there were gigantic armors with helmets standing at the entrance of the audience room that looked like two gatekeepers. ^[28]

Those might be more or less 3 meters.

Their size might be identical to that of the Magic Armor; just like the statues of fierce guardian gods, they looked down imposingly at the people who come to the audience room.

^[29]

There isn't any Giant tribe in this world.

There might be a gargantuan race that I am not aware of.

At least, there is no one who can wear this armor in the KDK.

Which means these armors are here to instill fear in the people who come here.

And then when you enter inside, there are armors in front of your eyes.

From the vicinity of the entrance to the throne, there are empty armors and helmets standing in line surrounding the audience room in a circle.

And thus, aside from the carpet of gold thread that continues on towards the throne, the armor and helmet inside is standing as if to protect the King.

It is the iron throne with a dark grey color that they protect.

A cushion is nailed into the metallic throne as if the armor was made into a chair.

The level of comfort looks really poor.

There aren't many decorations.

It's more or less decorated with a mark of an allied country or something like the crest of the Knight Party, but that's just it.

An unrefined stone wall with silver armor and helmets.

'Well, isn't it fine to just line up something this powerful', a suitable feeling like that.

Despite this overpowering feeling of a great number of people standing by and watching me...

.....Since I cannot recommend it to all the people, the evaluation should be four stars.

"The 33rd Generation King of the Kingdom of the Dragon King, His Majesty 'Stelvio von King Dragon' is now present!"

While I was thinking about it, His Majesty the King's introduction ended.

With my face down as it is, I fell to one of my knees and waited for the next words.

"Raise thy head, what is thy name?"

"I am 『Dragon God Orsted's』 subordinate, Rudeus Greyrat. It's my first time meeting you. Your Majesty looks to be in good humor."

Sitting on the throne of that audience room was an ordinary man.

With dull blond hair that doesn't really match with the crown.

His age might be around 40 years.

He looks like Ariel's older brother in terms of his mood.

Prince Gravel the First.^[30]

"So it's you, defeating that Water God Reida, that one person who stopped the army invading Shirone alone, the so called Rudeus Greyrat?"

The rumors are again getting embellished by mistake.

It won't be long before I end up being a merman. ^[31]

"No, Water God Reida was dealt with by my master, and we were successfully able to stop the army with not just me, but by my teacher's help, and also together with the army troops stationed at the Karon Fortress."

"What an honest person."

I can't feel the dignity of a King.

Is it because I just met him, or is it because I've seen so many people overflowing with dignity?

"However, Water God Reida and North Emperor Auber are dead; I'm positive that those truths have not changed."

"Yes, I cannot deny that."

"Our Country respects true strength rather than social status. We intend to evaluate highly those who leave behind actual results all the while they are in similar cases of such opposition."

"I'll hold onto those thankful words."

Uh-oh, that is an unexpectedly good feeling.

I generally expect to be looked down upon, but.....

As I thought, it's thanks to my treading on steps.

It might be because of the power of the clothes borrowed from the embassy.

"The opportunity to listen to a story from a person like thou is rare.....but, adversely a person like thou does not need to appear without any business in front of I."

"That is....."

"Oh, wait, don't say it, let me guess."

The King stopped me from talking by pushing out the palm of his hand in front of me and gently brushed his chin.

It was a neat and well prepared beard.

Come to think of it, there are many people in my country who grow out their beards.

There are many shavers in Asura.....it might be their culture.

"First of all, it's not some government service.

Thou should have friendship with the Queen Ariel of Asura.

Which means, other than our country, if thou went to Asura as well, it's profitable. It's because thou should also be able to have a title of nobility as well as government service.

How is it?"

".....It's as you have said."

The King stared even more fixedly at me.

And then he continued while smiling with a broad grin.

"I must provide convenience to someone like thou to come to this country.....well then.....

Oh, that's right.

Come to think of it, there was a strange rumor floating around the streets.....

Shagal, what kind of rumor was it?"

On the King's words, one of the Knights that were standing to his side quickly lowered his head.

His face gave off an air of delinquency. If you looked at him, he was wearing the same armor as Randolph, similar to Knight Party's.....

Ah, no wait, Shagal?

He's a person who has been properly investigated.

"Rudeus Greyrat is calling out to each and every nation to prepare for Laplace's revival that is 80 years from now, or that's how it's called."

Commander-in-Chief Shagal Galgantis. ^[32]

KDK's 『First Commander』 .

A quarter-blooded long-eared race, his rough speech stands out, but he's an able person with his sharp conduct.

Or so I heard, but his ears are short and his usage of words is also polite. Is it because he's in front of the King?

"Oh, that's it."

Even Millis's Pope knew about it, but as expected, you can't make light of a large country's intelligence network.

"And aside the consistency in the call out, thou put thy organization in each nation and perform business by use of those organizations.....am I wrong?"

"No, you're not."

He's not wrong, but.....

Even so, it feels like the conversation is going towards the wrong direction.

"And thus, just like every other nation, thou have come to me to ask for permission to cooperate.....isn't that right?"

The King has a satisfied look on his face.

Well, yeah.

I had that intention if not for Gisu's matter.

But this time, it's a little different.....

Still, if I deny what he said, it might result in a bad mood after those words spoken with such satisfaction.

It's not like I'm uninterested, but...

"Special permission is necessary for doing something so selfish. I don't dislike that attitude of thine."

The King continues to talk with a good mood.

He might have been looking forward to my arrival after obtaining the news about my movements.....

No, that can't be.

"However, it also affects what's called prestige of this country when I permit something immediately when demanded.

It will be troublesome when foolish crowds of people descend down upon us after hearing that the King will grant anything if requested."

"....."

"Therefore, that one condition.....what is it?"

The King made a puzzled expression when I silently raised my hand up.

We're starting to lose the sight of conversation little by little.

This fellow can't be dealt with properly.

"I apologize for interrupting, Your Majesty. Though what you say isn't wrong, what I came for today is because of a slightly different matter."

".....Hoh."

I'll tell him about the previous matter.

"It's regarding Benedict-sama's child."

King's expression changed.

The worn atmosphere too.

"According to what I heard from my friend Randolph, it looks like Benedict-sama's child.....Pax-sama is a burden to deal with, so there is some kind of movement going on right now regarding his disposal or so I've heard."

"What about it?"

The King didn't imitate timidity and overbearingly spoke out.

"Now that she has become a mother, there is no use for her as a political maneuver. At any rate, there is no need to let a person live who would become a hindrance sooner rather than later in this country."

"What about Randolph-dono? If you kill that person, Randolph-dono would immediately run away."

"The Kingdom of the Dragon King is not a lesser country which can be easily influenced by one of the Major World Powers."

Well, it's only right.

There will be no reason to go with the matter of killing Little Pax otherwise.

"In other words, the reason you came here was to appeal to spare that child's life?"

".....No."

I said that while looking directly at the King.

"I thought whether I can accept it or not if it's something that is not necessary rather than sparing life."

"Ha."

The King responded with a nose laugh and turned his sight to the Knight Shagal on his side.

"Did you hear that, Shagal?"

"Certainly, with these ears."

The King stamped his feet with a 'don' and bent his posture forward.

Putting his elbow on top of his knee, he stared at me as if glaring.

His attitude is different from before.

This might be this King's true nature.

"Then I shalt ask. Rudues Greyrat, what kind of mutual benefit will that proposal have?"

However, there is no need to panic.

No need to feel nervous.

Perugius's way consisted of dignity.

"Well then, let me gladly serve my story."

All of the internal conditions of this country are within our company's control.

The President knows everything.

What would become of the result because of my movements and things like that.

"First of all, after the death of the former king, the vassal states of the KDK are being attacked by at least three countries. From the country of Strife Zone in the North."

"....."

"Even you say it's under control, a vassal state can't become that if not for support.

The KDK has suffered a serious wound in the middle of this disorder that is war, yet even now you are coping with your absolute extent."

"What.....about it?"

"I can bring a stop to it all."

Since it's Ariel who is stirring up that war anyway.

Given that they force the sale of weapons on them by agitating the countries that can't help but attack the KDK.

Asura Kingdom is rich and I am much obliged to them as well.

But, money doesn't grow on trees.

That is why they occasionally do dirty work.

Well, even if Asura Kingdom stops doing something like that, they produce vast amounts of gold.

That is why, if I had to say, then there is a stronger meaning behind KDK's harassment.

If I tell her to stop, she would stop. Probably. No, surely.

"After that, Your Majesty. Since the King's death came to pass, a loan was borrowed from the Millis church in a hurry because a large sum of money was necessary, right?"

"....."

"Currently, although the loan itself was paid back, you ended up permitting the Temple Knight Party's sojourn in the domestic.

With the Temple Knight Party forcibly inducing their religion in the domestic, little problems are slowly but surely staring to rise."

"And you can stop that?"

"I can stop it."

If a little bit of loan is still left, I can't interfere though.

But, if there isn't, I can't let the harassment of KDK by Millis Kingdom to pass through.

If I give a call to the Pope or the Miko, the Temple Knight Party would immediately return back to their country.

I might end up owing a debt to Ariel or the Pope, but it's no problem.

It's an advantage to have connections at a time like this.

We'll consider about the demand when the time comes.

"Furthermore, in the case a problem arises between Pax and the Shirone Kingdom, let me take responsibility and face the full brunt of it."

In that case I should take Zanoba along.

With Zanoba and Randolph, that's three people.

It will take the form of Pax's battle of revenge.

"How about that?"

I'll give 3 marks to my presentation in outline.

It must be satisfactory to make the best use of the troublemaker as an advantage.

"....."

But I can't outstrip the King's expression.

He's glaring at me with a scary face.

Was something insufficient?

"I think that is sufficient."

The one who send out the lifeboat was none other than the Knight Shagal.

"Rudeus-dono can speak for both the Asura Kingdom and Holy Kingdom of Millis.
He has authenticity.

Rudeus-dono's proposal won't work as a big plus for us since we already had a countermeasure plan for our country, but.....according to the inquiries on the streets, it looks like Rudeus-dono has a firm grip on Queen Ariel's and Millis's Miko's weaknesses. It will be a plus to have a connection with the well-known Rudeus-dono.

The form it will presently take to cover up the big minus with the small minus, therefore the plus will---

"Shagal, be silent for while."

Shagal shut his mouth in a hurry on the King's peaceful words.

"I understand about the advantage being there."

Then, just what are you dissatisfied with?

"But, I can't make light of this man's attitude.
It's like we're playing right into his hands."

Ah, I should have deprecated myself and praised him more.
I might have gone a little bit too far.
It's difficult to adjust such a thing.

"I didn't mean to say to accept it if it isn't agreeable.

Treatment of Benedict's child should be done by the parliament itself.

Like hell I would change that decision on one person's suggestion that suddenly arrived."

"That is why Your Majesty, doesn't it explain itself that the Parliament is the last resort?

Would you bequeath the mayhem to sprout in the future or lose the 『Death God』 sooner? I'm in favor of the former by the parliament, but if there is a better choice to choose from, then there isn't anything strange about that."

"That's not it. That's not it at all.

I'm just worried over how to protect the dignity of the KDK's history.

If it was known that I performed indecisive politics as soon as I became the new King, it would affect the loyalty of the future subjects."

The King is worried about his honor.

Looking at Shagal, he looks like a supporter.

However, it doesn't look like they have any dignity left now that they have unfolded such a conversation in front of me.

"Hmmm....."

Well, it's fine to just decide at your own pace while bearing in mind that there aren't any personnel here.

With people like the Prime Minister; at your own pace.

It's understandable that it is not a bad story if properly talked with.

On top of that, even if it's declined, I have already prepared my next move.

All of the personal information of the leader of this country is already obtained and arranged.

People liked, people not liked, weaknesses; if I remove the obstacles while making use of all of those, it might be possible to change his opinion.

Since they will likely pull back later, I don't want to do that much.

".....Kirk, what do you think?"

The King called out to the young man sitting a little far out.

His age is around similar to mine.

With blond hair just like the King and a slight beard.

I have examined him as well.

Kirkland Von King Dragon. ^[33]

Currently the first Prince and next in line to become King.

Extraordinarily smart and excels at political abilities.

But, a pitiable future awaits him.

The future called unrequited love.

Currently, he has fallen in love.

He went to the Asura Kingdom's crowning ceremony as an ambassador and fell in love with Ariel at first sight.

Afterwards, he comes to Asura Kingdom countless times and confesses until he becomes 25 years old. An honorable defeat.

Whether Ariel cruelly rejected him or not, thereafter Kirk floats the flag of Anti-Asura.

"I think we should take that proposal."

Although he has not yet been rejected.

As of now, he expresses his friendship with the Asura Kingdom.

"Until the Strife Zone is suppressed, not letting the public know that we have a hostile relationship with Asura Kingdom has always been my opinion.

I'm well aware about the friendship between Queen Ariel and Rudeus-dono.

We should consider accepting Rudeus-dono's proposal and also include the link of cooperative relationship with Dragon God Orsted, on the grounds that it will become hard for Asura Kingdom to interfere just like now.

Above all, I advise that the following should be done for the sake of our country."

An aura of an able person is floating from the one who clearly said all of that.

There's a huge difference between us.

About half of that speech might have an ulterior motive regarding Ariel.

It might be because he's an able person that I can't even feel an atom of guilt in him.

Probably the personality of a handsome man (ikemen).

"Hmmm...."

The King looked up at the ceiling after hearing those words.

As if the answer is written there.

"Alright.....then, let's accept that."

The King said with a sigh and returned his gaze to me.

That reply might have already appeared within him. He just couldn't consent to it in the middle of that expression.

"Thank you very much."

In accordance with the manners, I bowed my head.

But suddenly heard a voice from above.

"Tis fine, raise thy head."

The presence of a King changed again.

I raised my head after he asked me, only to see a bitter smile on his face.

There is no dignity here; it's just the bitter smile of a tired person.

"The Kingdom of the Dragon King is currently in this state.

This situation of disorder is continuing because of an indecisive King with no dignity.

I apologize to you who are staring at 80 years later and preparing accordingly; I might be able to provide cooperation of little significance."

".....Well."

Ah, so this is it.

This is the true nature of this country's King.

I recall Orsted's information while discerning that.

King Dragon King Stelvio's time of reign is short. ^[34]

After 10 more years, he comes down with a severe disease and transfers the throne to his son.

After Kirk becomes the King, KDK shows a terrifying display of progress.

The real KDK starts from there.....Stelvio is only a character who connects that.

Therefore, I didn't consider much about this character.

But, why is it?

I have now become interested in this country's King out of importance for Shagal and Kirk.^[35]

I ended up being pleased with just a little bit of conversational exchange.

"I have a fondness for such things."

He sits on that throne surrounded by armors.

He must properly do his role as a King without any talent.

However, he was likely never corrupted while helping his surroundings, and he lived to the utmost as a king. No, it is likely he lives.

While at least acting as a King.

"Hahaha, fondness. You are an impolite fellow. Rudeus Greyrat."

"Please excuse me for that."

He is undoubtedly a person who can't leave anything in history.

It's not like he would gain some kind of great benefit even if he associates himself.

But I want to get along with him as long as he lives.

I thought that genuinely.

Part 3

Thus we were able to save Little Pax's life.

Benedict was released from her everyday fear and Randolph was greatly delighted.

It will also be a congratulatory matter that the KDK won't lose Randolph.

I also took this opportunity to fulfill my first goal of "Putting Gisu on the wanted list" and took a breath of relief.

I'll look upon the matter of Mercenary Group's establishment sometime later; it should be fine if I take that matter during that King's reign.

From now on, we are on cordial terms with KDK.

It would have been excellent if not for this match pump....

I will be taking a debt from Ariel and Pope this time around, but I'll pay it back eventually. We don't know what would become of this one case of Little Pax in the future. When that time comes, I will settle that matter again along with Zanoba.

"Well, you saved me. At this rate I would have taken my master and was about to destroy KDK."

Randolf said that with a clattering laugh while we were parting.

This man might or might not have that power in actuality, but he certainly has the resolution.

Whether to let the soldiers die fighting with Randolph.

Or let the dispute with Shirone Kingdom rise in the future.

Why choose the former? Isn't that foolish?

I might be thinking like that because I tasted Randolph's strength in person.

"However, if His Majesty the King has been satisfied with this, then the things that I'm capable of doing are lost as well. That is not good."

He's trying to say that he has no intention of leaving Benedict's side to the bitter end.

Well, it should be good if the case is that.

"Is Rudeus-dono acquainted with the Demon Emperor Kishirika Kishirisu?"

".....Yeah, I've met her at least twice."

"If you're searching for a person, then I recommend searching for her first."

I see.

There was Kishirika as well.

Roxy said that she used her powers to find Zenith.

The one who gave me the demon eye of clairvoyance.

If we ask her, she will definitely tell us about Gisu's whereabouts in an instant.....though I won't be able to reach there immediately, but it should considerably narrow down the possibility.

Why didn't I think of that before?

Well, I don't really know whether she is an existence who can be relied on much.

"I don't know what she will demand as compensation, but if you take this ring and say it's 『Randolf's wish』 , she should be somewhat able to listen to an unreasonable request."

"Oh!...."

So it's not necessary to treat her to food.

"I understand. Well then, I'll be accepting this."

For one thing, I received a white ring from Randolf.

It's probably made out of some kind of bone.

An ominous item. It seems to be cursed, but.....it's a profitable piece of equipment.

"Well then, Rudeus-dono, I pray for your good luck."

"Be in good health as well Randolf-san."

And thus, we left behind the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

Next is the Demon Continent.

To Demon Lord Atofe's place.

Chapter 4

Infiltrating Fort Necross

Part 1

Demon Continent, Guthrow region.

It's one of the most severe areas of the Demon Continent.

The monsters living on the Demon Continent, when compared to the other continents, are extremely strong and numerous.

However, even on the Demon Continent there are distributions.

Like how the Biegoya region has many Acid Wolves and Pack Coyotes, this region is overflowing with monsters that are much stronger than the other regions.

Able to release a petrifying breath, the Basilisk.

Flying freely through the sky and attacking with its powerful jaws and poisonous claws, the Black Drake.

Imitating a pond, the enormous Lake Slime.

Extremely nimble and covered in hard scales that resist magic, the White-fanged Serpent.

Besides that there are areas that are covered in poison gas and deep valleys, so this region is called the worst part of the Demon Continent.

There are few towns or villages, and the ones that exist are transforming into secure fortresses.

Even Adventurers rarely come here...

However, it is said that those on journeys to sharpen their combat skills have this region as their final goal.

After all, this region has the fortress once built by the immortal [Five Elements Demon King] Necross Lacross, the strongest fortress on the Demon Continent.

The one ruling here is Demon King Atoferatofe.

The [Immortal Demon King] of the Guthrow region.

400 years ago she was a powerful warrior for Laplace, who clashed countless times with the party of the Armored Dragon King Perugius.

Among martial artists, there is a legend about her that is thought by many to be true.

[You who desire power, travel forth.

You who desire power, set your gaze on the Demon Continent.

Journey through the Demon Continent, reach Fort Necross.

Journey through the Demon Continent, gain audience with the Immortal Demon King Atoferatofe.

Display your power to the Demon King, and thirst for a greater power.

You shall gain a overwhelming power that you have never seen the likes of before.]

And the ones who follow the legend and set out on a journey are never heard from again.

Nobody knows the truth...

I know it, though.

Most die along the way, and the rest are forced into Atofe's elite guards.

Occasionally there are those who return... but even if there are only one or two people who tell the truth, the rumor shouldn't disappear.

That rumor is probably erased by Atofe's associate, Moore.

It's a cruel trap.

Playing with the naive hearts of martial artists, a devil's trap.

Well then.

The members that are going to meet her number three.

Me, Eris, and Roxy.

Aisha is in charge of mediation with Asura and Milis on behalf of the Kingdom of Dragon King.

By the way, we're bringing alcohol as a gift.

According to Orsted, Atofe seems to be fond of alcohol.

Well, even so, it will probably turn into a fight.

Part 2

Fort Necross was about three hours from the teleportation ruins.

That's not such a great distance, but the teleportation ruins are in the mountains, and furthermore, it's in the middle of a Black Drake nesting ground.

We traveled on foot while shooting the black flying dragons out of the sky, turning the defeated drakes into yakiniku^[36], and the discovered eggs into tamagoyaki^[37].

From fairly high up the mountain, we descended while sometimes evading the attacking monsters but other times routing them, and arrived after a full day.

This is the first time I've been to a teleportation ruin so close to human habitation... Or rather, this is the first place where people live that I've been to that's so thick with mana.

"Well, we can afford to take it easy."

When I turn to face her, Eris is gleefully cutting apart the attacking monsters.

It's as if she's saying it's the result of her daily practice.

Although she certainly has never skipped out on practice swings, she shouldn't have had that many chances to fight...

It seems she's been hunting the monsters around the town when I wasn't looking.

"As expected of such a feared place... Just thinking of coming here alone gives me goosebumps."

Roxy's fatigue is showing.

She's been trying her best to find a route that avoids the monsters.

It's no exaggeration to say that it's all thanks to her we were able to protect the gift of alcohol.

"Roxy still has a long way to go!"

"Back in my adventurer days I moved around more, but recently I've just been working at a desk..."

"If you're like that, you'll be looked down on by the students."

"You're right... Then, please help me practice sometime."

"Of course!"

While listening to Eris's and Roxy's conversation, I looked down at the fortress spread out beneath us.

The overall color is black.

It's probably made from the same materials as Kishirika's castle.

It's not too large.

It seems to be just a castle and town protected by thick ramparts.

It's not a rare sight in this world.

What classifies it as a fortress is probably its structure.

It is separated into five blocks by the ramparts, and goes up like a staircase.

The three bottom ones are a normal castle town.

The second from the top contains buildings that don't look inhabited and something that looks like a sports ground. They're probably military installations.

At the top, a black castle-like building towers imposingly.

That's probably the keep.

We end up approaching it from behind.

From back here, it looks pretty defenseless.

Although since the rear is guarded by a mountain, it's only natural.

"Ah, someone's there."

As we drew closer while thinking that, we saw people standing upon the rampart.

There are around five people wearing black armor, outfitted with helmets.

They are watching us, and seem to be raising a bit of a fuss.

"Do you suppose it would be bad manners to enter from this side?"

"No, there's no such etiquette. They're probably talking about how rare it is for travelers to approach from the mountain.

When Roxy plainly said that, Eris rapidly progressed forward.

What should we do if arrows rain down from above?

Though I was thinking that, the people on the wall weren't showing any signs of attacking.

Before long, we reached the rampart.

There seems to be a rear gate, since I confirmed the existence of a large door.

Since it's a black gate on a black wall, it's not visible from afar, but looking up close it's quite obvious.

[O heroes! Congratulations on reaching Fort Necross!]

It's the Demon God Language.

It's been a while...

Like how you never forget how to ride a bike, learned languages aren't forgotten so easily.

Rather, what did they mean by heroes?

[What admirable spirit, crossing the demon mountain!]

[Is what you seek the honor of being a champion^[38]? Or perhaps it is the Demon King's power!?!]

[Whichever it is makes no difference to us!]

[If you want to pass here!]

[You will first have to defeat us, Atofe's elite guards!]

In other words, we can't enter here.

It's only natural.

No country would let an unknown man enter through the rear gate.

[I understand. We will circle around to the front.]

It's not particularly a problem if we go in through the town.

We'll obediently circle around here.

We're here to ask a favor, after all.

[.....]

[...]

The black armors went silent.

They're all asking their neighbors what to do.

I've heard about Atofe, but I never heard anything about fighting here at the gate.

Did I say something wrong...?

[Ah, if you could tell Moore-san that Rudeus Greyrat brings tribute for Atofe-sama, it would be a great help.]

It may be better to tell them up front that I'm no one suspicious.

While I was thinking that and about to turn around,

[Wait! Are you a visitor for Atofe-sama!?!]

That was shouted at me.

[Yes, I have talked with her a little before! I would like to give her my greetings!]

[I understand. We're opening the gate!]

Ooh.

They seem to be willing to let us in.

It's bothersome going around, so it's good that we can go right in.

[I wanted to enter from the front, though.]

Eris complained, but I think it's better to enter from here.

Please excuse me from an attraction like having to defeat the Shitennou^[39] to proceed.

Part 3

We arrived in Fort Necross's audience chamber.

It doesn't have a ceiling.

It's an open-air room.

There's a long staircase sandwiched between thick pillars carved with devil-like images.

At the top of the stairs is a large, spacious room.

The room is surrounded by candles burning with violet flames, and in front of each candle is a soldier clad in black armor standing at attention.

The room is completely open, with no walls or handrails. If you approach the edge, you could probably look down on the castle town.

In the center is an ominously decorated throne.

No, this probably isn't an audience chamber.

This is probably that.

The place where in dire times, a giant magic circle is engraved to call out an ancient devil.

Then, the hero's party will fight the demon king to prevent it.

This is that kind of place.

It's not an audience chamber.

It's a battleground.

"O heroes, well done in coming this far!"

Now then, sitting on the throne is a woman.

She's wearing the same black armor as the others around us.

Her height is around the same as Eris's.

With a gleeful face, she spread her mantle.

The evening sun descending over the mountain cast a profound shadow upon her.

It appears to be a very impressive and fantastic scene.

It appears to be.

"I am the immortal Demon King, Atoferatofe Raibaku!"

We entered through the back gate, met with Moore, and waited for about 2 hours to be brought to this battleground.

Were they making preparations during that short time?

Or did they anticipate this fantastic scenery and wait for evening?

Either way, I'll give them 4 stars.

"How admirable, coming this far with the body of a human!"

"O brave ones who overcame countless trials! I ask you thus!"

"Is what you desire the prestige of being a champion? Or is it the title of hero!^[40] Or perhaps... the Demon King's power?"

What a distasteful question.

If you answer 'champion' or 'hero'^[41], you get beaten up and made into a subordinate, and if you answer 'Demon King's power,' you are made into a subordinate without getting beaten up.

It's an extreme multiple choice where you can only answer [Yes].

"Fufun..."

Ah, somehow Eris started grinning.

That's right, you like this kind of stuff, don't you?

"Atofe-sama... mumble mumble..."

Right then, the nearby black armored Moore whispered something into Atofe's ear.

It's probably about the programme.

Even though I said that I came to apologize, she's been saying hero this and hero that, so there is probably some kind of misunderstanding.

"Shut up! It's too bright here and I can't understand!"

Atofe Punch!

Moore-kun is blown away.

"Show me your face!"

Atofe left her fist that blasted Moore out and rapidly approached.

And then, she was right before my eyes.

"Ah."

As soon as our eyes met, Atofe's expression rapidly changed.

She is glaring.

And then, she spoke in a low voice.

"It's you..."

Her voice sounds like she's saying 'I found you.'

Scary.

"... It, it's been a while."

"After working with Perugius, to catch me in a trap, you, without concern, came here..."

Atofe has a ferocious smile on her face.

However, that is within expectations.

That's why we brought a tribute.

It's no exaggeration to say that we came here to apologize.

"About that, I would like to give my apologies..."

"It's fine. You're making a much more manly face than last time. It's a good face, full of resolve. The heroes that challenged me all had that kind of face."

Atofe isn't listening to me.

She's just closing in on my face with her eyes spread.

Then she smiled, showing her teeth.

I could see her growing fangs.

"It's the face of someone prepared to die."

H, Huh?

That's strange.

I should have predicted this... Huh?

Why, are my legs trembling?

N, Not good, the trembling is spreading to my whole body...

"Hm?"

Then, my vision was filled with something red.

Red hair.

"Get away."

Eris forced herself between me and Atofe.

"Who the hell are you?"

"Eris Greyrat."

"Hooh."

Atofe took a step backwards.

Then, she stared into Eris's face.

"That's a good expression, good killing intent, and you're even carrying good weapons. And your guts to prepare to cut me down..."

Atofe shot Eris a sharp gaze.

Eris stared back with a beast-like glint in her eyes.

The tension is rising——

"Are you a hero?"

"That's right."

No it's not.

What the hell are you saying?

"That woman is determined and observing the surroundings... a magician?"

"... That's right. My name is Roxy Greyrat. It's an honor to meet you."

Roxy slightly lowered the brim of her hat and gave a greeting.

I think it's pretty obvious that she's a magician just from looking at her clothes, though.

"You also have a good expression. You want to fight me?"

"... If Demon King-sama is planning on killing my student, then yes. Though I am not worthy."

Aah, even the calm Roxy is planning to fight.

Which means I'm currently cowering that much.

Enough that she thinks she has to protect me.

That's no good.

I've got to pull it together.

"Kukuku, that's interesting. The three of you are all Greyrats... For three people who just happen to have the same name to gather and come before me, is truly interesting."

That interpretation is certainly interesting.

Both Eris and Roxy are my wives.

Yup.

Okay, I've calmed down.

"Atofe-sama, before fighting, can you listen to what I have to say?"

I stimulated my shivering legs, and turned to Atofe.

"Why?"

"Because we came to talk."

"I hate talking. Since you Human Race people always say things I can't understand."

"I think what I have to say is pretty easy to understand."

Then I exchanged looks with Roxy.

She put down the bag she was carrying and drew out a wooden box.

I received it from her, and held it out reverently in both hands to Atofe.

"First take this. It's an apology for last time."

"What's this?"

"It's wine from the kingdom of Asura."

"Alcohol!"

Atofe's complexion changed.

Just like my information.

According to Orsted, among the heroes that fought her were those that challenged her to a drinking contest, planning to defeat her when she was dead drunk.

They ended up losing though.

In the drinking contest, that is.

"During the Asura Kingdom's coronation ceremony, it was presented to the crown by Lord Notos Greyrat, an extremely rare and expensive good."

"Is it tasty?"

"Very."

Or so I answered, but I never tasted it, so I don't really know.

According to Ariel, this is wine that was produced 100 years ago.

About its taste, the fields and warehouses that produced it were regulated by the royal purveyor, who said it would be a waste to drink it all up, sealed it in the depths of the warehouse, and declared that it wasn't to be brought out except in special circumstances. However, it's been 100 years since then.

The royal family had many important events, and it was all used up.

However, that's only concerning the royal family.

There are still some remaining in the storehouse of the producer, Notos Greyrat.

For Ariel's coronation ceremony, 10 bottles that were in the storehouse were presented.

Part of Philemon's brown-nosing.

The current price would be around 300 Asura Gold Coins per bottle.

It's worth 1 Rinia.

That's why it should be quite delicious.

Of course, it's not like I bought it.

When I asked Ariel what a good alcohol would be, she gave me one of these.

Later on, when I asked someone else for its worth, I was surprised.

She immediately consented to the matter of the Kingdom of the Dragon King too, lately she's been selling me a lot of favors, and it's kind of scary.

It seems like sometime she's really going to take one of my children...

"I see, so it's tasty."

"Yes. So please forgive me for the previous matter."

"I forgive you; I'm much more lenient than that Perugius. Something like that is nothing to me."

"Thank you very much."

I guess this means that we're even?

She might forget after drinking, though.

"However, I won't forgive Perugius. I'll kill him someday."

Please feel free.

That's something between the two of them.

I'm sure Perugius won't bow his head for forgiveness.

"So, is that all?"

"No, there is something else."

I took out one more bottle from Roxy's bag.

This is something I got from Orsted.

This one isn't in a box, and the maker and price are unknown.

The glass bottle seems old, and is losing transparency, and some sort of pattern is carved in it.

However, Orsted said that Atofe will be pleased with it.

So I think the contents should not be bad.

"This is——"

"Oi!"

It was snatched away.

"Don't tell me... It can't be... Moore!!!"

At her sudden scream, the black armors became discomposed.

In the rowdy atmosphere, one person calmly approached.

It's the man whose face caved in and collapsed in a pool of blood, Moore.

"Look! What do you think!?"

Moore took the bottle and carefully examined its surface.

Then, seeing the marble-like deposition inside, he took a deep breath.

"It's exactly the same as what we saw before."

"Right!? You, where did you get this from!?"

"From my master, [Dragon God] Orsted, who wishes to get along with Atofe-sama."

"Dragon God...! Then, there's no mistake...!"

Atofe looked at the bottle while trembling from head to toe.

"This is without a doubt, what Urupein sent for mine and Kal's wedding, the phantom alcohol passed down through the Dragon Race!"

Oh, so something like that happened.

Then of course she would be pleased with it.

"Its name is [AleschneilDragon God Jewel Spirit]!"

Whoa, what an amazing special technique. I'm getting goosebumps.

Or rather, it's ale, huh? The glass was so dark I couldn't tell.

"That's the only time I've ever drank this. I've searched far and wide, and finally I have it once again!"

Tatarata~^[42]

Atofe held the bottle so joyously that it seems like that sound effect would play.

In any event, if she's pleased with it then that's great.

I should say as expected of Orsted.

He knows well who would like what.

I feel sorry for Ariel, but this match is Orsted's complete victory.

"Then, that alcohol——"

"I've decided! I'll defeat you and take this alcohol!"

Atofe declares that with wine in her right hand and Aleschneil in her left.

What she wants, she takes by force.

Truly a Demon King.

"I'm giving it to you!"

"What!?"

"It's a small gesture of friendship from the Dragon God Orsted to Immortal Demon King Atofe!"

I reply in a loud voice.

Question marks are rising from Atofe's head.

When three question marks have risen, her head burst.

"You! Don't chicken out! Fight me!"

"Even without a fight, I'm giving you that alcohol!"

"I don't get what you're saying!"

So she doesn't get it...

Is that so...

I'm pretty sure I made it easy to understand, though...

"It's not a banquet, it's not a congratulatory event, it's not as an apology. In that case, why would you offer something like this?"

Moore followed up nicely.

That's right.

It's no good if I don't explain that, right.

"Right. To tell the truth, in the near future I'm going to be fighting with a man called Gisu. He said he was going to gather powerful troops to defeat me... I was thinking I would like Atofe-sama's assistance for that fight."

I'm not going to touch the topic of the coming war against Laplace.

According to Orsted, if I ask her to help in the war against Laplace, she would definitely not give her approval, and it would end up becoming a fight.

It's not like she feels a sense of duty towards Laplace.

It's simply that it's too complicated for her to understand.

In the future that Orsted knows, Atofe will unmistakably serve Laplace.

It's definitely safer to not try persuading her.

It's probably best to request such things from Moore later.

"Okay, I understand! I'm not an idiot, after all! It's fine! I'll do that!"

Atofe definitely does not understand it very well.

She's nodding with the same face as Eris when she says "I understand" when she really doesn't.

This kind of answer means that Atofe probably won't be taken along by Gisu's cajolery.

"So then, is the talk over?"

"Yes."

Thus, I gained Atofe's cooperation.

The Death God and the Immortal Demon King.

Getting the two people who defeated me to this side feels like a large advantage.

I don't know where Gisu is or what he's doing, but it looks like things are favorable so far. But I'm glad. At first I was thinking it would turn into a fight and was on guard, but it's great that we won't have t—

"Okay, now let's duel!"

—Huh?

"Earlier, you said [before we fight]! Our conversation is over. Then, next we fight!"

Huh? I said something like that?

No, but, huh?

I gave her alcohol, and was forgiven.

She promised to fight on my side... there shouldn't be any more reason to fight.

That's strange, Orsted never told me about any of this.

"I am the Immortal Demon King, Afoteratofe Raibaku! Heroes, all three of you, come at me at once!"

Why the hell...

I'm bewildered.

Roxy also has question marks above her head.

The elite guards aren't moving, so this is probably the Atofe Standard^[43].

However, an astonished atmosphere is floating this way.

Moore has a "There's no helping it" kind of expression.

There's only one person who stepped out in front as if to say she's been waiting for this.

"I'll be your opponent."

It's Eris.

As if the distance to her opponent doesn't matter, she walked right up in front of Atofe and brought her face close.

"Hoh, you want to fight me one-on-one?"

Their faces are close enough that you could think they may be about to kiss.

"There's no need for Rudeus to take on someone like you."

"You've said too much, little girl."

Atofe fell for that obvious provocation, and let out killing intent.

"In these past 100 years, you're the only one to say something like that to me."

If she wasn't holding a bottle in each hand, that would have been a cool line.

However, if she fights like this, the bottles will surely break...

Or so I was thinking, but Moore said "I shall take care of these" from beside them, and carried them away.

"Someone like you is fitting to be one of my elite guards. I'll beat you to a pulp and make you my subordinate."

"If you lose, will you do what Rudeus says?"

"Sure."

Fight, win, make an ally!

Easy to understand means something like this, huh?

I messed up.

I made a bit of a misunderstanding.

'I'll give you something so forgive me for earlier, and I'll give you something else so become my ally' is too complicated for Atofe!

In any event, I knew from the beginning that it would likely turn into a fight.

Fight, win, and make Demon King Atofe into a supporter.

We made plans for that, and properly prepared.

Let's do it.

Thus, our fight with Demon King Atoferatofe began.

Chapter 5

Fierce Battle, Demon Lord Atofe

Summary up to the previous time- The battle with Atofe began.

Part 1

"I am the Immortal Demon Lord Atoferatofe Ryback!
I'll bestow you with the title of hero if you can defeat me.
If you lose, I'll make you my puppet and use you until your last breath!"

Spreading an overwhelming killing intent was Atofe.
Moreover, the one who was opposing her was the figure of a hero.

"Sword King Eris Greyrat!"

Eris held one of the Sword God's Seven Swords 『Phoenix Elegant Dragon Sword』 above her head and confronted Atofe.

"Sword God Style, huh!"

She happily unsheathed her sword without separating eye-contact from Eris.

"I'll tell you beforehand, the Sword of Light is ineffective against me."
"....."

Eris isn't agitated by Atofe's words.
Even she knows that.
She has heard about the Legend of the Immortal Demon Lord.

Immortal Demon Lord Atofe can never be defeated.

She doesn't have any technique.

Her sword is dull and slow.

She just can't die.

No matter how many attacks she takes, no matter how many fatal wounds she sustains, she won't die.

She will rise even after receiving any type of attack.

And then gain victory at the end.

That is the Immortal Demon Lord Atofe.

There are only less than 10 veterans, including one of the Three Heroes' Demon Slayer, who were able to oppose her during Laplace's military campaign.

Feared as the symbol of dread, the only one who was said to have solely defeated her was the North God Kalmann.

Eris is having an insight.

She is thinking, 'Can I defeat that Demon Lord in front of my eyes with my strength alone?'

Nay.

It's impossible with just one person.

Exaltation can be felt for challenging a legendary being, but she doesn't hold any techniques to defeat Atofe.

However there is no need to lament over that.

Even if she doesn't have a playing hand, there is a person who already has one.

Since the arrangement of that situation has already ended in advance before coming here.

"....."

"Hey, say something."

Eris doesn't talk.

"Well, there was a fellow like you who concentrated all the nerves and fired an extremely powerful blow....."

"....."

"Fufu, I remember it since I have good memory.

Although that blow never did reach me and I smashed that person with my fist like a frog."

Atofe might have recalled about that time.

She glared at Eris while a wicked smile 'kukukuku' rose to her face.

"How about it? Eris Greyrat.

It's a once in a lifetime gamble.

Would you expose ungratefulness in front of your trusting comrades.....or is it honor?"

"....."

"My neck is right here. If you take my head back home, you will be regarded as a hero of the Human Race and leave your name in history for eternity."

Striking her neck with a 'tonton' is Atofe.

With an expression that is overflowing with self-confidence.

'This woman won't be able to kill me.'

That sort of self-confidence.

The surrounding Imperial Guards are sighing.

'Ah, Atofe-sama is getting negligent again!' and sighing.

Nevertheless, against heroes, letting them get one attack in is an unavoidable disposition for the race of the Immortal Demon Lords.

"Not really, I don't want something like honor or anything."

Eris said clearly.

"But I'll slice off your head."

"Well said! Eris Greyrat! Now, come!"

Atofe's shout reverberates.

The evening sun falls behind the mountains, the surroundings are wrapped up in slight darkness, and the violet flame lighted on the candlestick shines upon the two people.

Atofe's eyes that glitter with burning fire.

Eris's eyes that are undauntedly staring back.

The gazes of the two cross and their killing intent collides together.

A critical situation of two people.

"Ah....."

However, the Imperial Guards weren't watching the two of them that time.

They were looking behind Eris.

There stood a giant.

A stone giant was standing within the slight darkness having a height of 3 meters.

Where the hell did it came from?

Is it summoning magic?

No, there are no traces of how it was done.

Furthermore, a blue-haired magician is standing separated several steps from that giant.

As if to say it's a success, the giant suddenly grips its hand and looks up from behind.

"Ah~...."

The reason Eris of the Sword God Style, possessor of a seemingly rough disposition, didn't attack—

A person who was standing within the Imperial Guards understood it and let out a voice of admiration.

The reason is that while Eris was stalling for time, Rudeus was busy in preparation.

He summoned the Magic Armor 『MK. I』 .

"Oh.....Ooohhh....."

The shadow standing behind Eris.

Atofe groaned, looking up at it.

There is a remembrance.

That armor. Even before Laplace's military campaign, during the Second Great Human-Demon War.

She remembers seeing it before it was sealed.

Its form is slightly different.

Its color is slightly different.

However, those are trivial things.

Like hell are there many instances of this sort of armor in this world that can be collected!

"Fighting God Armor.....!"

Atofe was looking up dumbfounded and muttering----.

"GAAAAAAAAaaaaaa!!!!"

Eris attacked.

--- Rudeus's Point of View ---

Eris's sword took flight.

Straight towards the left nape of Atofe's neck, who was looking up at the Magic Armor.

With the shortest distance.

The Demon sword that transformed into a long straight beam of silver light glides towards Atofe's nape while keeping the overwhelming power of bloodshed as it is.

And without change goes through---

"Su!?"

It stopped.

The sword came to a halt midway through Atofe's neck.

"....."

Atofe's sword was sticking into Eris' right shoulder very deeply.

Eris' right arm lost movement with just that.

It didn't stop.

It was stopped.

By a thrust of the sword into the gap of bone and bone like a support rod, though expressed as the strongest sword technique, Longsword of Light was stopped. [44]

"GAAAAAaaaaa!"

Eris gave up on her right arm in an instant.

Using only her left hand, she swung the sword.

By all rights, something like a neck is severed in just one strike of the Longsword of Light.

But the power is halved if it's dealt with just one hand.

Only 1/3rd of Atofe's head was left while adhered to her torso as it is.

That would naturally result in death.

But the enemy is Atofe.

The Immortal Demon Lord Atoferatofe.

"SRRaa!"

Atofe, who was looking like a half-corpse, kicked Eris in the air.

Roxy caught from behind Eris, who was blown off with an unpleasant 'begon'. [45]

Eris continued to look towards Atofe with ferocious eyes while the top of her shoulder was gushing out blood.

Her turn was up till now.

"oooOOHHHH!"

Atofe turned towards me while raising her roar.

She prepared her sword as if to defend and took up a forward-bent posture.

And thrust her sword into me as I was preparing the Gatling Gun.

Since Eris was blown off, I started shooting in a straight line.

"『Shoot it thorough』!"

A rain of rock cannonballs poured down.

First step. Atofe's armor was smashed into several small pieces.

Second step. Atofe's shoulder was torn to pieces and the sword danced in midair.

Third step. Atofe's upper half of the body that became full of holes was blown off and separated from her lower half.

There isn't a fourth step.

The lower half of her body, now without the upper half, while waning and shaking violently, fell.

This spectacle is bad for the heart.

Since she is the Immortal Demon Lord, blood isn't coming out, but if blood had spurted out, I might probably feel sick.

I can't get used to becoming a murderer.

There is no way I can get used to it.

I was able to do it because I knew that she wouldn't die even if I fired the Gatling Gun from such close range.

That's right.

She won't die, right? Even though things may appear this way.

"Did we do it?"

Roxy inquired while applying Healing Magic to Eris and anxiously surveying the Imperial Guards.

Until Atofe gives the order, they won't attack.

Everyone, there is no need to worry about Atofe.

I have absolute faith towards the proprietress of immortality.

"Not yet."

I replied while being vigilant.

"Is it our turn after this?"

"No, that's unreasonable."

"Look at the floor. Hasn't the black weekday steel been gouged out?" [46]

"Even that armor doesn't make any sense. What's that magic....."

"Before when he fought Atofe-sama, that guy used a rock shell with amazing power. It's probably that."

"Ah, I see. So it's a rapid firing rock shell."

"Which means, apart from the armor, that staff(?) might be a magic tool."

I am getting analyzed for some reason.

What a careless bunch.

But they probably know that Atofe won't die from just that.

Atofe revives.

The scattered pieces of flesh draw near towards the large piece of meat.

Little by little, those pieces combine and start returning to their former size.

I guess it returns back by itself even if you pull out the hair, unlike a certain parasitic creature.....[47]

It also feels like a life force that will regenerate from a small piece of meat by cell division even if the pieces of meat don't entirely return back. [48]

Such a creature can wear armor on its body and even use martial arts.

She'd obviously be powerful.....

Atofe returned back to her previous form as I was thinking that.

However, as a result of blowing her full of holes, her upper half is naked.

I ended up seeing the muscles more forged than Eris's and large breasts not inferior to Eris's.

Is there any significance in forging those muscles even though she is such a creature.....?

There probably is.

Rather, the matter of forging them becomes even more meaningful to her than it is to humans if you consider that the cells won't die.

Very interesting.

"Do you still want more?"

After the regeneration finishes, I ask the now unarmed Atofe.

With the resolution to fight.

However, it's not like opposition won't come if it comes to fighting seriously.

Moore, who is looking from behind, will be deemed as a hostile opponent if we have to erase Atofe here in all seriousness.

He will commence the attack by leading the Imperial Guards when he judges us as hostile.

Or so I've heard from Orsted.

We've also more or less come up with a plan if it comes to that, but.....

Well, it's better to satisfy Atofe by knocking her down many times over.

I don't know how many times I will have to face her, but I'll keep her company until my magic supply is exhausted.

"Don't want it!"

Or so I thought, but Atofe shouted.

Thereupon, Moore rushed over and put a cloak on her.

"I'll immediately go and pick up a change of armor, so..."

"Humph!"

Atofe sat down on the ground with a 'plunk' and crossed her legs.

She doesn't intend to fight.

But she's looking at me, seemingly annoyed.

That's really unexpected.

I certainly thought that she would be rushing towards us like a wild boar while reviving.

Or give the order to her surroundings and siege us.

"....."

She was disregarding Eris, who was standing next to me and setting up her sword. Roxy, who was preparing the staff was also standing behind oblique to me, but I guess there is no need for her turn.

"....."

Atofe is fixedly staring at me.
Silently and motionlessly for a short while.

"Moore, do you remember?"

And said that with a sigh.

"No, during the Human-Demon War, I was still...."
"That's right. That's how it was."

Atofe muttered with an unusually calm and low voice.

"It's different from that time.
It was more golden in color during that time.
Its power and speed are there, but such a weapon didn't exist."

Atofe might be talking about the original 『Fighting God Armor』 .
The strongest armor made by Laplace.

"But the Human Race was like that.
At first, they were weak. Absurdly weak. If we invaded, they would easily collapse and run away.
But they steadily changed after a short while.
When I realized it, they had changed their personnel, armor, and weapons.
Their method of fighting was like that too.
They would become firm, fall apart, and lie in wait within the mountains and across rivers.....

While doing so, they became stronger little by little.
Kal said that it was the strength of the Human Race."

Atofe's face is settling down for some reason.
The way she's talking feels somewhat intellectual as well.
The Immortal Demon clan probably enters a wise-man state after regenerating once.

"Did you build that?"
"Yes."
"I see....you're strong, truly strong."

Atofe said that with a refreshed face.

"It's a pleasant story. Since Father wasn't able to win against the Dragon Race after many hardships when the worthless Human Race were able to overtake....." [49]

Atofe slowly stood up.
With Moore on her side, she looked up at me with her arms folded and talked.
While I wasn't able to catch up with her meaning, she continued.

"I recognize my defeat. As promised, I will be under your jurisdiction while you continue to live."

Thus, Atofe became a comrade.

"Rudeus Greyrat, you are a hero who defeated me."

Incidentally I became a hero.

Part 2

After that, a party was held at Atofe's fortress.

It's a party for the subjugation of the Demon Lord.

The organizer is the defeated Demon Lord herself.

Imperial Guards are the staff.

Participants are also the Imperial Guards.

On the occasion of the party, a large military drill was organized.

Organized in the center of the arena, such things as tree persons are put in order for athletics and a carpet made out of beast leather is spread out to encircle the circumference of the surrounding area with all of the guards eating and drinking. ^[50]

Demon Lord Atofe was defeated.

Having said that, the people captured by Atofe weren't released.

It'd be troublesome for me if Atofe's war potential of Imperial Guards decreases; Atofe definitely might have understood that situation too.

For now, it's just like before.

They're not all cops and robbers and we can't proceed to release all the members just like that. ^[51]

Well, if some fellows want to return no matter what, we'll send a few of them little by little when we get the chance.

If it's just a little, then even Atofe won't notice.

Although every member of Atofe's Imperial Guards is absolutely enjoying the party.

They don't seem to have the intention to fly the banner of revolution.

"Today is an auspicious day. Drink! Sing! And Fight!"

Even though Atofe was defeated, she was in a really good mood.

A party hall right in the center of the arena.

She's glowing in satisfaction by waging fights against fellow subordinates over there.

It seems she's pleased to receive the alcohol I gave her, looking at how she's shouting "Delicious!" each time she takes a drink.

It's a really mysterious feeling, but it slightly resembles that of Badigadi's around there.

Things like drinking and singing first before a duel.....

They're siblings after all.

The Immortal Necross may have been a fellow like that too.

"Hahahahaha, that's good!"

"Crush 'em good!"

"Your guard is down! Raise it! Raise it! Woww...."

There are many hand-to-hand fights that are being performed in the arena.

It's a manly fight with only bare hands without armor nor weapons.

There are robust men of the Imperial Guards who tightly grasp their fist and knock their opponents hard.

Ah, no, wait. That's not a fellow guard. It's not even a man.

"The victor is Eris!"

The one in the arena is Eris.

That fight might not have been enough for her.

The Demon Race of Atofe's Imperial Guards are knocked down by movements like those of a ferocious stray dog.

They were said to be the elites, but Eris too isn't holding a sword.

If it's a fist fight, whether they are equally matched or one of them goes easy on another.....

No, they're not holding themselves back.

Some players that have fainted are scattered around the side of the arena.

As if Eris has already beaten the crap out of at least three people.

They are hurt, but Roxy arrives and uses healing magic within a second, so it should be fine.

You've become strong, Eris.....

"AHHAhahahaha! Strong aren't you! As one would expect from the comrade of the hero! Who's the next one!? Who will dare?"

"Fight me! Demon Lord Atofe! Get down here!"

"Ahhahahahahaha! You're an even bigger fool than Kishirika if you're challenging me to a fist fight! All right, I like it! I'll become your enemy!"

Atofe suddenly threw her cloak off while getting her upper half naked and comes down to the arena.

The grounds were filled with nothing but shouts of joy.

The party is now at its climax.

Will Eris win or Atofe?

Odds are probably higher for Atofe. However, if it's Eris, a totally unexpected result could-----

"Rudeus-dono.....Rudeus-dono!"

"Oh, excuse me."

I'm not participating in that party.

I'm in the middle of a meeting at the fort's room with Moore regarding the matters hereafter.

Even though I should have been the leading actor.....the party is now at its climax.

I wonder for what reason the party was held.

"Ahem, I understand the regarding circumstances.

Search and kill that apostle Gisu and Hitogami and also provide backup when it comes to war.

Search for Kishirika-sama. Establishment of an intelligence organization. Provide backup during Demon God Laplace's war.

Is that roughly all?"

"Yes."

Unlike Atofe, Moore was a person who understands conversation.

Listening to my request, summarizing it, he's positively considering it.

Perhaps he holds Atofe's intelligence characteristics; he might have been born by jumping out of that narrow skull.

"Aside from the former two, the latter two, especially regarding the war with Demon God Laplace, we probably won't be able to provide support."

"Is it unreasonable after all? Because of the debt to Laplace or the like....?"

"Atofe-sama was defeated by you personally. If you die, that will be over. Or will you be able to live even until 80 years later?"

".....I guess that's difficult."

Personally until the end.

I, individually.

It might be possible to let them think that Roxy defeated her, but.....

Well, it can't be helped.

This too is probably fate.

"Assisting the Mercenary Group is difficult as well."

"Is it a territory conscious thing after all?"

"Atofe-sama reigns over this region, but the ones who control it are the Imperial Guards. Building a different organization is convenient to make use of, but we can't look after their troubles."

".....I understand."

Mercenary group too is overdoing it.

Just building it should be fine, but we mustn't forget that the head of the neighboring organization is Atofe.

If a problem occurs, to settle it, strength is needed instead of wit.

Surely, such an incident might occur, and before you realize it, destruction would have set in.

"Regarding the search for Kishirika-sama, let's send out letters containing Atofe-sama's sign to the Demon Lords of various areas. They will surely lend a hand if it's just a search."

"Please do."

"There is no need for you to request. The one delivering the letters will be you. Since we don't know the exact place of the Teleportation Magic Circle."

"Ah, yes."

That's right, now that he mentions it, these people already know about the Teleportation Magic Circle, so there is no need to hide it.

Teleportation Magic Circle.

It's a taboo for the Human Race, but it might not be a taboo for the people of the Demon Race who have longevity.

"Since Kishirika-sama doesn't run away without a particular reason, she will probably be found out immediately."

"It's better if she's found as soon as possible."

"It depends on the speed of the letter's delivery, but.....she might get discovered within this year."

I can't find where Kishirika is as usual.

"Just why does that person wander around like that?"

"Well it's unclear to me just how the members of the ancient demon race think."

".....But of course."

In my opinion, I think Moore is also from one of the ancient demon races.....

I don't know how long they live, but if it's the Immortal Demon race, they might live for centuries at a time without getting affected.

"However, Rudeus-dono sure has become stronger. There's quite a difference if we compare you from before when we met."

"It's the power of the Magic Armor."

"Such an honorable honesty."

"There is no conviction in my honesty. I was able to obtain Atofe-sama's power by making her surrender, but I myself haven't dramatically become any stronger."

『Strength』 can be produced.

It's an agglutination of magic and skill.

It doesn't mean that I can just obtain that 『Strength』 with my power alone.

Me, Zanoba, Cliff, and Roxy too these days.

If not for them, the Magic Armor would never have seen completion nor operation.

"You're the second person after North God Kalmann whose strength was recognized by Atofe-sama in just one blow, and she decided to come under your jurisdiction."

"I think I am inferior in regards to the level of the Major World Powers."

Before long, the one defeated would have been me if she had kept resurrecting and continued fighting again and again.

Since I don't have an inexhaustible supply of magic.

"We'll readily supply if there is insufficiency.

Be it skills, armor, or comrades.

Atofe-sama has come to recognize all of those.

Therefore, she always hangs around all of the members.

Since that is the strength of the Human race."

He's probably saying that.....the strength of the human race is the power to put things together.

Making use of weapons, armors, and comrades as well, while accommodating all of those with strategy and tactics.

No matter the enemy, we won't utter cowardice.

For this reason, Atofe accepted defeat and Moore is praising me.

I'm somewhat content with that.

"However, just like Atofe, we the Imperial Guards still have the swordplay of North God style. We don't think you fought in all seriousness."

"I'm deeply impressed by those words."

Atofe fought alone this time.

But that is the minimum force as far as she's concerned.

She still has much more power to bequeath.

I don't know where she will intend to use it.

The future me was outwitted by Moore and was defeated.....

I just happen to see a vision of conflict with the Imperial Guards, so for that reason I prepared something in advance just in case.

Roxy was there for that reason.

She possessed scrolls for every hypothetical situation.

If we're able to pin Moore down even for just a short time, we could at least prepare our retreat.

Or so I thought, but it might have been risky if the Imperial Guards had genuinely participated.

"Moore! Mooooooooorree! Bring Rudeus here!"

And a callout came from Atofe.

The loud voice which called out to Moore resounded till here.

When I looked out the window, Eris was falling face-down and Roxy was rushing towards her in a hurry.

Looks like she lost.

Well that's obvious.

"We should start going soon. Please use the Lithograph that was installed just now for making communication."

"Yes, but before that."

While saying that, Moore presented a box that was located to his side.

Looking like a large Japanese dictionary.

A box that has an ominous demonic pattern carved into it and feels like I'll be cursed if it's opened.

It was unexpectedly light after I held it.

"From Atofe-sama, I hand this over to you from us."

".....And this is?"

"When you're caught in a dilemma, please open this. It will definitely become your strength."

I see.

The enjoyment of trying to open it, is it?^[52]

"Well then, shall we go?"

"Yes."

I put the box in the baggage and left the room.

After that, I sat next to Atofe, watching the competition from a special seat and treating myself to alcohol.

A team competition of 5-5 by the Imperial Guards.

Moore and others are showing off very flashy magic.

The rest are doing acrobats like the Chinese Athletic Association and musical instruments are being played resembling a former troubadour.

Although I wasn't able to enjoy much looking at them.

For some reason, Atofe who was sitting next to me was naked above the waist the whole time and continued to do so.

Good gracious, I am in trouble as to where to look.

The abstinent Rudeus has become greedy because of the abstinence itself.

"....."

When I started taking glances, before I knew it, Eris who was sitting next to me pulled my ear and Roxy who was sitting on top of my lap blocked my field of vision towards Atofe. It was an enjoyable party.

Side Story

We're Married

An assembly of dozens of houses. Crude fences.
Small fields with pakkun flowers^[53] on the sides.
Middle schoolers flocking to a large cauldron.
All of them were just as before, just as in memory.

"I trust you're still healthy, Father-in-Law?"
"I wonder about that..."

It was as if time had stopped in the Migurd village.

About two months had passed since Atofe was recruited.
During that time, I made rounds delivering letters to demon kings in various locations.
With Atofe's letter and Orsted's recommended tributes in hand, we went from one end of the Demon Continent to the other...which is to say with the teleportation circles.

The demon kings were a colorful bunch.
Bagraa'Hagraa^[54], the gourmet Plundering Demon King who resembled a pig.
Rinebine, the Demon King of Faces who could only have an expression like that of a Moai statue.
Sahmedy'Nohmedy, the Demon King of Light who always emits light from his body.
Patlsetl, the Alluring Demon King whose semi-transparent body was concealed by a veil.
And the list goes on.

We even met Kebrakabra, the demon king of Displeasure that Orsted had warned about.
He was a spherical demon king with open holes throughout his body, and was constantly emitting the stench of vomit from the so-called holes.

We had went to all the locations with the resolve to fight.

They're demon kings, after all.

When thinking of demon kings, Atoferatofe or Badigadi are the idiots at the top of the list. They aren't the type to listen to what you have to say.

Or so I thought, but they were surprisingly communicative.

They were delighted like children when I gave them gifts, and when I gave them Atofe's letter, they would mutter, "A hero...?" with their faces pale, avert their eyes, and hang their heads.

Some were even unable to control their bowels while entreating, "Please don't kill me".

Kebrakabra, the demon king of Displeasure was even one of them.

I came to a good understanding of just how feared and irregular Atofe is.

Demon kings are basically a bunch of nice people who simply just do what they want to do. If you give them a firm request, they'll consider it with a serious expression.

However, while I had also asked about the search for Kishirika, most of them had replied "I'm not sure about that far off" for the things related 80 years from now.

The long-lived demon kings apparently don't think about future matters.

On the way, we stopped by the town of Rikarisu^[55] both the town that Badigadi rules over and where Kishirika's castle is located.

The crater town that Kishirika had once set up as a stronghold.

Badigadi wasn't there, nor did it seem like he had ever returned upon asking around.

No matter where I wandered to, the soldiers would only shrug.

For the time being, I gave a letter to the defending soldiers and requested they not just search for Kishirika, but Badigadi too.

There were a few demon king castles left and it was looking like things were going to end without a hitch.

When we got to that stage, Roxy called out to me.

"Would it be alright if I visited my hometown for a little bit? Don't worry, it'll be over right away and I'll quickly come and go on my own."

Like hell I would let you go alone.

I promptly returned home, grabbed Lara and a betrothal gift, and returned to the town of Rikarisu.

And upon ending a three-day journey, we arrived where we're presently at, the Migurd village.

Just Roxy, Lara, and I.

Eris had said this and that and restrained herself.

I told her to at least thank them for the sword...but upon realizing that even she had remembered the thing called restraint, I was deeply moved.

Rokary, Roxy's mother, froze upon seeing Roxy.

Well, not quite; she wasn't looking at Roxy.

She saw me standing intimately next to Roxy, the child Roxy was carrying, and then froze.

Some people in the village took a look at Roxy and then stared intently at her.

I'm sure they were trying to use telepathy, but Rokary was different.

Her thoughts had certainly come to a complete halt.

She was petrified for about 5 seconds or so.

"Mother, I've returned."

Spoken out to, Rokary then trembled.

"R-Roxy, who is this man, and this child?"

"My husband and child."

"...!!!"

The next instant, Rokary made an expression as if to say "Oh!" and surveyed her surroundings in a fluster.

Almost simultaneously, the nearby Migurds looked at the spot we were at, so she was probably yelling something with telepathy.

Or maybe she was calling for Royn, Roxy's father.

She might even be saying, 'Eek, Honey, Roxy brought home a man!'

"...."

"...."

The silent gazes hurt.

However, I'm Roxy's man.

I must behave myself in a way that she won't be embarrassed.

I folded my arms, aligned my legs, and threw out my chest, cladding myself in Psycho Power...^[56]

"Mother, is Father around?"

"Y-yes, I just called for him. He's at the elder's home...so I'm sure he'll be back right away."

"Then, please let us wait at the house. When too many gazes gathered on Rudy, he started making a weird pose, as you see."

Whaat!?

Weird!?

It was the pose of a venerable evil leader, though...

"Now then, Rudy, this way."

"Alright."

Abiding Roxy, I followed after her.

The luggage feeling heavy on my back was likely the pressure from meeting the father-in-law and mother-in-law.

I want to think that the affectionate posing didn't belittle my beloved Roxy.

"Thank you for having us."

Glancing about while following after the two, we entered the home of Roxy's parents.

Come to think of it, I didn't ever go inside their home last time I was here.

Maybe they'll let me see Roxy's room from when she was little.

Well, I already know there's no concept such as a private room in this community, though.

"I wonder if there's enough food in storage..."

"No, we'll be leaving before long, so don't worry over us."

"But Roxy, you've finally returned, so stay a while."

While listening to Rokary's lonely tone, I sat down near the hearth, and Roxy promptly sat down beside me.

"We're rather busy, you see."

"Is that so..."

Rokary looked rather dejected.

If we were inclined to, I think staying 3 or 4 days would be fine...

But Roxy isn't all that fond of her hometown, so it may only be natural she would want to leave quickly.

"Nevertheless, you returned so suddenly...and with such handsome gentleman in tow, too..."

Rokary once again looked at me, and after a fairly unrestrained examination from head to toe, she suddenly bowed her head as if realizing something.

"Oh, how slow of me. I'm Roxy's mother, Rokary. It's nice to meet you."

Meet me, huh...?

It goes to figure she wouldn't remember me when we only met once over 10 years or so ago.

"I'm Rudeus Greyrat. We've met once before."

"We have..."

"Yes, around 10 years ago, once. Ruijerd had brought me here."

"You're acquainted with Ruijerd Supardia? But he was last here..."

Hearing Ruijerd's name, Rokary put a hand on her chin as if pondering it.

Eventually, she let out a small voice, seeming to have something come to mind.

"Are you by chance the small human child who was with Ruijerd when he was going on his journey?"

"That's exactly right."

"Oh my...! How nostalgic! You've certainly gotten bigger, I see. Only a little less than 10 years have gone by, but when humans get so big, they're already splendid adults, right?"

"Right. I think of myself as an adult, though lacking in many areas..."

There, I placed my hands on the floor and bowed my head.

"It's a fairly late notice, but I've wed your daughter."

"...Oh, certainly. Erm, are you fine with this girl?"

"This girl is very fine."

I spoke, looking at Roxy, and her face went red.

"Um, is Roxy being a proper wife for a human? There's friction between humans demons, isn't there? She isn't being a bother, is she?"

"Regardless if there is some, I'm constantly being helped by Roxy. The most reliable one in my home is none other than Roxy."

"Is that right..."

Roxy poked me in the side.

Wondering what it could be, I looked over at her, and she spoke to me in a whisper.

"You're flattering me too much."

Not a word was exaggerated, though.

"But, such a handsome... Are you really fine with our daughter?"

She repeated the question she had just said.

Even Rokary seems fairly flustered.

"Rudy has two other wives as well. I have a position similar to a concubine, so even if I were more or less unworthy, no problems will arise."

Roxy interjected.

Roxy doesn't have a single unworthy point about her, nor have I ever treated her as a concubine, though...

"Is that right... But..."

"Mother, you're making it embarrassing, so please cease."

"Oh...ok. But I'm still worried. You were always unsociable and silent back then..."

"I understand my own faults. But as you see, I've given still given birth to a child, and am fulfilling my duties as a wife."

Duties makes it sound businesslike.

Even if, for example, she never gave birth, my love wouldn't waver, though...

But maybe it is better to say it that way.

"Rudeus, is this true?"

"Yes. At the very least, my love for Roxy will never run out. I swear to God."

My love is agape.

It's infinite love.

"I see..."

Rokary wore a bewildered expression.

It's probably best to show with action after all.

Thus, I tried embracing Roxy's shoulders.

Oh, she caught my hand.

You've got it wrong, Roxy, I wasn't thinking of trying to touching your butt, I thought, but she grasped my hand.

Roxy's hand was very warm.

"Like that, I see."

Rokary seems to have reached an understanding.

Then Lara, who was sitting next to Roxy, suddenly turned her face toward the outside.

"Oh, Royn's returned."

Looks like the father-in-law has arrived.

I'll have to once again give him my regards.

I'll brace myself.

I was ready to prostrate myself any time.

Things went smoothly with Royn.

He had a similar reaction to Rokary.

He would say similar phrases, and I would say similar responses. It was very smooth operating.

Looks like I won't have to prostrate after all.

"At any rate, congratulations, Roxy. I'm glad as long as you're happy," Royn finally said, being moved to tears, and grasped Roxy's hands.

"Thank you, Father."

Roxy and Rokary were also tearing up.

I wonder if I'm actually making Roxy happy.

In the first place, what is happiness?

I'm not certain, but I want to maintain my love for her.

"Still, Roxy married, huh... The Roxy that would trip over nothing and be a moment from crying when she was small..."

"Please leave out these kind of stories in front of Rudy."

When Roxy was little, eh?

I'm sure she was adorable.

Or maybe her outer appearance wasn't all that different from right now.

If I had met her at that time and grew up together...I'm sure our relationship would be different than it is currently.

Well, regardless of the relationship, I don't think the destiny where I respect Roxy would be replaced.

"Still, I never thought I'd see my grandchild's face."

Seems like Royn was getting emotional.

His words were that like of chiding, but he lifted Lara up in a good mood.

Lara, like always, didn't struggle and simply stared at Royn.

Seeing this made Royn break out into a grin.

"I see, your name's Lara. Being able to clearly say your name, you're a clever one.

"Huh?"

"Huh?"

I think Roxy and I let out a voice at the same time.

Lara has yet to say her name.

Or rather, she has yet to say anything at all.

‘So what is this...?’

I thought, when Roxy came to a realization and stared at Royn.

"...Can our girl use telepathy?"

"Huh? Yeah. She still has a little difficulty with it, but is clearly understandable."

Roxy and I exchanged glances.

The shocking truth that just came to light.

That our little girl was an esper.

Thinking it over, it really isn't that strange of a thing.

Roxy can't use telepathy, but both of Roxy's parents can.

Which means it just isn't hereditary.

"You weren't aware?"

"...None of us can use telepathy, you see?"

"Really...? But Lara says she often talks with grandma."

Grandma.

In this case, Lara's grandmother...doesn't refer to Rokary.

It's Zenith.

"Ahh..."

At the same time, I reached a sort of understanding.

Miko had said so, that Zenith can read others' minds.

Thus, Lara was quite the chatterbox in Zenith's memory.

The always silent Lara who wore a stern expression.

She had happy memories of chatting with Zenith.

I see, telepathy.

Lara had always been talking with telepathy, which is how she was able to converse with Zenith.

"...."

For some reason, I'm relieved.

But Roxy didn't share my feelings.

She had a somewhat troubled expression while hanging her head.

She might be thinking about how her daughter can do something she herself cannot.

It was getting dark here.

"Really... Eh? What should I do... Lara, it's Daddy~"

I said, standing up and brushing Lara's head.

Lara didn't smile or anything, just staring at me.

She's probably saying something.

"She says she has no idea what you're saying."

Oh dear?

Oh, right, I was speaking in the Demon God language.

'Lara, it's Daddy~'

This time I used the human language and peered at Royn.

"She says she knows that."

Oh, she knows.

I suppose that's natural, there's no way she wouldn't.

I say it often enough, anyway.

Nevertheless, how dry.

I think even an "I love you Daddy" would be fine even as just lip service.

Recently, even Lucy been saying it.

I suppose language and telepathy aren't related, though.

Maybe spoken words come off with a different nuance...

I suppose so, otherwise conversing with Zenith would be difficult.

"At any rate, I was thinking she was a bit of a late bloomer, but I'm actually a little relieved."

"She's still young, so she can only speak with her head, but I'm sure she'll be speaking with her mouth before long."

Royn said with a nostalgic smile.

"I'm sure what you two are feeling is the same when we had Roxy."

"What do you mean?"

"We also thought Roxy was a bit of a late bloomer when she was born, since she couldn't speak..."

Roxy, the only one in her family who can't use telepathy and Lara, the only one in her family who can.

They are similar situations.

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

All the same, I'm relieved.

Our girl is growing up just fine.

I really was worried she had no one to speak to at home, but it was nothing of the sort.

Zenith clearly has been, and likely Leo also has some sort of telepathy power as well and has been conversing with Lara with it.

Once she's able to speak with words, she'll be able to interact with the other family members as well.

It's just a little longer.

"Lara is just like Roxy, isn't she?"

"Ha ha ha. Right, just like her, particularly her eyes."

Royn was happily laughing and Rokary was enjoying herself, too.

Even Lara, in some way, looked like she had an expression of enjoyment.

After that, I paid back the money they had lent me times ten, and presented them the betrothal gift.

I was grimacing inside at the Great king Land Tortoise cooking I haven't had in so long, while on the outside I was saying how delicious it was.

It was a fun time.

I'm glad I came here, I thought, but Roxy's expression didn't liven up.

She didn't cheer up all the way to the end.

In the end, Roxy and I decided to stay the night in the village.

Maybe in consideration of being a married couple, we were staying at a vacant house nearby Roxy's parents' house.

The three of us were sleeping with Lara in the middle in an unoccupied house with a little dust still remaining.

Were this a hotel, I'd feel something over there only being one bed and two pillows lined up.

Though it's not like I can do that stuff when Lara's with us, and right now I'm Rudeus the Abstinent anyway.

Even with Roxy lying next to me, I can keep my hands off of her.

But seeing Roxy lying down with her eyes shut certainly isn't helping.

I started to feel maybe just a little was ok.

I'm getting excited, or rather, I am excited.

Well, let's think about it.

I began a life of abstinence for a little while so I can't have any children.

To flip it around, anything fine as long as it can't end up with children.

Fate won't go amiss just from the act of ejecting the evil matter.

Roxy is safe.

That said, if you'll pardon me here—

"Rudy."

Faah!

I'm sorry.

It was just a passing impulse.

"Are you still awake?"

"Zzz zzz."

"Skip the pretend sleep. Didn't you just look me in the eyes?"

I reluctantly opened my eyes.

Roxy, who was lying next to me, was staring at me with a serious expression.

"It's about Lara."

Lara was already sleeping soundly.

Usually she had the most brazen expressions, but her sleeping one was that of an angel.

"To be honest, I had been thinking that was how it was."

What is, I couldn't bring myself to ask.

It was what she spoke of today.

The fact that Lara can use the Migurd racial ability just fine.

"I had been quiet up until now...but every time I saw Zenith and Lara staring at each other, I considered the possibility."

"It never came to mind for me."

"I'm sure. You've been quite busy these few years, always moving around."

I haven't been watching over my children, is what it felt like she said.

Well, if I had assert one or the other, maybe it would be that I haven't.

Maybe I've just been watching the cute parts and doting on them.

I haven't done a single thing that would count as raising or educating them.

Frankly, I've just been taking advantage of Sylphy and Roxy for that.

"What kind of expression is that? I'm not blaming you for it."

I appreciate that she can say that.

No matter how much I worry and reflect over it, my hands are currently full with the Hitogami stuff.

I have no resources to devote to raising children.

"It's just, I was thinking a little."

"About what?"

Roxy was stroking Lara's head.

"I was born in this village. Once I became aware of my surroundings, I grew up always feeling alienated."

"...."

"Thinking back on it, those days were really difficult. Leaving the village, going to a town where they came to mutual understanding with words, making acquaintances there, and when I began my life as an adventurer, I keenly realized that the world I lived in was right here."

She can't do what everyone else can.

Not being able to do just such a simple thing.

When asked why she couldn't do such an ordinary action, she wouldn't even know.

Just unable to do it and spoken of as a useless failure by her peers, and she even recognized herself as such.

But that really wasn't common sense.

She was glad she couldn't do it.

When Roxy knew that, she undoubtedly had an indescribable sense of freedom.

"If Lara is raised as it is, maybe she'll have the same thoughts I did. I may be glad I left the village, but Lara isn't me. There aren't any other races that can use the same ability as the Migurd."

Roxy, then, suddenly looked away.

But she may be right.

The Migurd don't leave the village often.

Even on the Demon Continent, I had almost never seen a race like the Migurds.

It may not be exclusive, but they are a self-enclosed race.

I can't say that Lara won't feel alienated in the future.

"So I was thinking..."

Roxy said, still facing away.

She had a troubled face as if she had no confidence in her own idea.

"How about leaving Lara with my father and mother?"

"...Huh?"

"I wondering that it might be best to live in the Migurd village as a Migurd until she's 10 or 15, until she's grown to some extent. Afterwards, wouldn't it be for the best to decide if she should leave or stay in the village? That's what I was thinking."

"...."

I want to be with my son and daughters as much as I possibly can.

I think that's the obligation as one who conceived them. I view taking responsibility as including that.

Minus the Hitogami stuff, I want Lara to be raised somewhere I can see.

But Roxy was telling me something she had thought hard over.

She isn't saying it because she wants to escape from responsibility or because she wants to resign from childcare.

It's because it will be hard on Lara.

She's saying it because Lara wouldn't want to go through the same things she herself had.

A child with blue hair who has a different means of talking with others.

There's no way there won't be painful times.

It goes without saying a parent can't shoulder the child's pain.

"I'm against it... But if you think it's for the best, then I..."

The words wouldn't come out.

I can't choose.

Should I prioritize my own feelings or Roxy's suggestion?

I could only keep silent, unsure.

"I'm sorry, Rudy. Please forget this. The conversation never happened."

Roxy said after a brief period of silence.

That was where we ended the day.

Roxy and I slept with our hands held.

The Migurd village was a quiet village.

You can't hear any conversation.

Since the villagers talk with telepathy, there were no conversations in the village.

Maybe some of them would greet Roxy, but she couldn't hear it.

But Lara probably could.

The conversations of the people preparing food over there, or a lover's quarrel inside a home, or all other kinds of racket.

"Seeing this lack of change, I can understand the richness my past ten years had...or rather, the bustle human livelihoods have."

Roxy spoke, turning her gaze to our daughter that she was carrying.

Lara, as always, was staring at Roxy with a surly face.

I don't think this village would change even after another decade.

Or even were there to be a change, we wouldn't notice it.

"Then, take care, alright?"

"It's alright if you stay a little longer..."

Royn and Rokary were seeing us off at the village entrance.

They looked rather lonely.

"Could I hold Lara once last time?"

Royn asked, and extended his arms.

Grandchildren are cute no matter where in the world you are.

It didn't appear like they have any intention of having children aside from Roxy.

"It's perfectly fine, here."

Roxy held out Lara, who she was holding, to him, or at least tried to.

"What's this?"

Lara was firmly clinging onto the neck area of Roxy's robe.
It was like a scene I had seen somewhere.

"Come now, Lara, say goodbye to grandpa and grandma."
"..."

Lara, making use of both her arms and legs, was clinging onto Roxy like a cicada.
Just like that, she looked over at me.
The usual surly and brazen face she always had was...gone.

Her mouth was warped, her brow furrowed, and she had an expression that looked like she was going to cry at any moment.
It was an expression asking for help.

"Ahh... Ha ha ha. Nevermind, it's fine after all."

Royn spoke with a wry smile, waving his hand.

"She's saying she doesn't want to be separated from Mom."
"...!"

Roxy looked at Lara, surprised.

Upon seeing Lara's expression close to crying, anxiety filled Roxy's own expression in the blink of an eye.

"No, want to be together..."

Lara said, as if squeezing out the words.

Our little girl, who had never spoken before, asserted herself for the first time.

"..."

Perhaps, Lara had heard last night's conversation.
Even if she hadn't, maybe she had a dream where she was left behind due to it.
Maybe all we did was make her meaninglessly uneasy.

"It'll be just fine."

Roxy hugged Lara tightly in silence.
Her lips were tightly pressed together while holding back tears.
As both mother and daughter were making the same expression, Roxy spoke.

"We'll always be together."

With those words, Lara relaxed with a relieved expression.

"Roxy, when will you come back next?"
"Let's see, once Lara is a bigger... I think we'll come again in about 10 years."
"...Alright, that's good. Take care, ok?"

Rokary said, not seeming to think of 10 years as all that long.

And thus, we departed the village.
The two saw us off at the village entrance until we were out of sight.
It was a bit awkward at times, but I'm glad we visited them.
Eris and Sylphy's parents are gone, passed away.
Roxy's parents were estranged, but even so, parents are still parents.
I think that as long as they're alive, you can visit them as many times as you want.

"Now, Rudy, things are going to get hectic again."
"They sure are."

Before that, I'll tidy up the immediate tasks.
With such thoughts in mind, we returned to the town of Rikarisu.

Chapter 6

The Fourth One

Part 1

We've finished going around and greeting each of the Demon Kings.

They've each given me their consideration.^[57]

Using Atofe's name is really convenient.

For now, everything has been going smoothly.

I've been getting along well.

Almost to the point that I'm starting to think it's gone too well; we haven't run into any issues.

Gisu has been strangely silent.

There hasn't been any interference from Hitogami either.

I've been diligently checking back in on the house, and there's no sign of any interference with my family.

I've had a look at the information on world affairs that the mercenary company has been collecting, and there haven't been any strange movements.

At least, my actions don't seem to have conflicted with Gisu's plot.

Gisu's letter might have been a bluff; he could be plotting something entirely different...

Or something like that, I don't know yet.

Even if I don't know, it's important to keep moving forward.

For now, there haven't been any Gisu sightings.

He's hiding himself well.

At least until I make a request of Kishirika, but she hasn't been found either.

Well, finding Kishirika is only a matter of time.

In the mean time, I've decided to continue networking.

The Holy Land of Swords.

Sword God, Gull Farion.

According to Orsted, he's a man of good character with a hobby of collecting rare swords.

According to Eris, he's not the kind of person to listen to what you have to say.

Once in the past I had also met Nina Farion, although...

Well, I had the impression that she was similar to Atofe.

According to the circumstances, I might have to bulldoze through the negotiations in the MK-I.

If that's the case, then it would be good to bring reinforcements.

That place will be full of people like Eris and Ghyslaine.

At least Atofe's elite guard, even seeing their boss stare down defeat, won't act unless commanded.

If a large number of Sword God-style swordsmen were to attack simultaneously...

I feel reluctant just thinking about it.

First of all I'll bring Eris... but, who else?

It would be unreasonable to ask Ariel to let me bring Ghyslaine...

"You! Clear your plate quickly, don't make a mess!" (Lucy)^[58]

"Aa, sorry. Yes, chew~ chew~" (Norn)

While thinking about such things, I was at home, having a meal with my family.

"Don't just eat everything but the bell peppers!" (Lucy)

"Eeh, the bell peppers too? I don't like bell peppers..." (Norn)

"Leaving the bell peppers is no good! Adults have to eat things even if they aren't delicious!"
(Lucy)

My daughter is still small, she's five years old.

There's no roof on our house. Our tableware is made of stone, and we're eating mud dumplings with muddy water to drink.

It's surely my fault, I'm not earning enough income.

Such hardship.

"Babu~" (Norn)^[59]

"Already, but Norn-chan I gave you my breast a little while ago, and you're already hungry again? I guess it can't be helped, say ahh~" (Lucy)

Speaking of which, Norn is already 15 years old.

She'll be 16 years old soon.

She'll also graduate from the magic university this year, we should probably hold some kind of event despite being busy, but she still seems to miss mama's milk.

"Wow~ Mama, thank you~" (Norn)

"That's no good! Baby-talk is no good!" (Lucy)

"Aa... yes. Babu~" (Norn)

My daughter still isn't good with words.

She's still an infant, so it can't be helped.

"Wan wan!" (Aisha)^[60]

"Already, Aisha's hungry too? There's no helping it, HEY, everyone, time to eat, come to the kitchen!" (Lucy)

Our pet is 15 years old too.

Recently, she's had to balance between housework and managing the mercenary company, almost like a career woman, but she always ends up playing the role of a maid.

Even so, she's still a brutish dog that can't fight against her appetite.

"Wafun~!" (Aisha)

"After you've eaten properly, you can go play with Norn-chan!" (Lucy)

"Wafu wafu, wa~an!" (Aisha)

"Babu~...!" (Norn)

"Yaah, it tickles!" (Lucy)

In a fit of excitement, Aisha jumped up, licking their cheeks.

A truly happy family.

I'll join in too.

"Yay~ Papa~ Papa~" (Norn)^[61]

"No! Papa don't do that!" (Lucy)

Rejected.

This must be what's called domestic discrimination.^[62]

Although it looks like a happy family, the marriage has lost its passion.

A cold married life, a rut.

I mean, why can't I act like a pet?

I want to hug and lick too...

"*sob* Papa is hated..." (Norn)

"It's different! Papa is great, but he's rarely home, and I'm holding the baby, I still love him! It just can't be helped!" (Lucy)

Maybe not that great, since I'm listening in.

But it can be helped, because I also want to hug the baby.

Love is warmth.

And since I'm warm, I'm happy.

"Um, Rudy... is now a good time to talk?" (Sylphy)

Suddenly, from behind, a voice was heard.

Turning around, from the window of the neighboring house, mother-in-law was... well. That's enough of that.

"Ah."

As I was standing up, the hem of my shirt was caught.
Lucy was holding it, looking up at me with an anxious face.

"Papa, are you gonna go to work again?"

I was considering it an hour ago.

About who I should bring to the Holy Land of Swords, maybe I should just ask President Orsted to make the trip.

Or how should I start the negotiations, maybe I should just go in strong...

And various other potential issues, then Norn brought Lucy over to play.

While hiding behind Norn, Lucy was fidgeting saying [Umm... papa, play?]

I consented without a second thought.

"No, I'm just going to go talk with mom a little."

"... don't go."

"I shall return immediately. Until then, play with your big sisters."

"... Yeah."

Lucy responded with a squeak and hung her head.

I'm reluctant to leave that cute face.^[63]

If it were possible, I'd play all day.

It was fun playing Lucy's husband.

But, because my true wife is calling, I must go.

"What's the matter? Sylphy?"

As I head back through the living room after washing my hands, I found Sylphy sitting on the couch.

"Yeah. Um... Recently, Rudy's been busy, right? So, I heard you earlier, and I don't think it's bad..."

Sylphy said with an embarrassed face while scratching the back of her ear with a crunching sound.

I wonder if it's something difficult to say.

"If I heard properly, are you leaving already for the Holy Land of Swords?"

"Ah, as soon as preparations are complete, probably another 2 or 3 days..."

I still have to decide who to bring.

Eris and someone else.

I'd like to bring someone sensible who can understand the Sword God Style.

I wonder if it would really be unreasonable to ask Ariel to lend out Ghyslaine or Isolte...

"How long will you be gone?"

"I'm not sure, probably between 10 to 30 days. I'll be back to visit."

Near the Holy Land of Swords, where famous swordsmen polish their skills, there are also master blacksmiths in training.

I also intend to forge a connection with them.

"Is that so... yeah, well, that won't be in time after all."

"... What?"

"The delivery."

As Sylphy said that, I noticed her belly.

A big belly.

And a slightly larger chest.

They are body changes unsuitable to the slender Sylphy.

"Ah... it's that time already."

No way, of course I wouldn't forget.

Sylphy is always in my mind.

It was just that I didn't realize we were so close to the due date already...

The stream of time is one that flows briskly.

"... can I touch your belly?"

As I said that, I moved in to touch.

Even though I'm just touching her belly, from the depths, I can feel the pulse of life.

The feeling of two hearts beating, something miraculous.

Sylphy is caring for two lives now.

And, after that life separates from Sylphy, it's going to become independent.

"Soon Lucy's little brother or sister will be born."

Sylphy gently placed her hand on top of mine as I was touching her belly.

"This time, Rudy won't be here for the birth?"

"No, I'll be here, in the house."

"But... Rudy..."

"I'll be here."

After hearing my child is about to be born, I can't just say [Well, take care] and leave the house on a business trip.

If I do that, I'll truly lose sight of what I've been doing everything for.

"... Thank you Rudy. I love you."

"I love you too."

Sylphy closed her eyes, and put her hand on my shoulder to embrace me.

Yeah, I'm happy...

"Ah, that's right. Before the birth, we should choose a name. Before you left for Milis, you said you'd think of one, right?"

I sat in a seiza on the floor.

Part 2

Thus, I decided to stay home for a while.

I don't feel a particular need to rush things.

Nevertheless, I feel a bit uneasy.

As I assumed a seiza pose, bowing with my forehead near the floor, I informed Sylphy that I hadn't thought of a name. She looked more disappointed than angry.

She was blue in the face, at a loss for words.

Like she had been betrayed by something she had believed in, she had that kind of expression.

But it only lasted for a second, and she followed up with [Well, then, we need to think of one]...

That's the face of disappointment.

I'm wearing out her patience.

Her voice just trailed off after that.

Yeah, that's right.

Surely, Sylphy has, for the last six months, believed in me.

Even when I was far away, she was looking forward to celebrating the birth of our child with me.

Of course, I had every intention of doing so.

I had the intention.

The action, however, I fell short on.

There's no doubt about that.

"Papa. What's wrong? Stomach hurts?"

"No, well a little, I accidentally hurt mama's feelings."

"Then, you should say sorry."

Lucy was trying to comfort me.

But, what Sylphy wants isn't an apology.

She doesn't want some superficial apology.

She doesn't want a heartfelt apology either.

No, what she wants is something more vague... she wants a sense of security.

"Lucy. Even if I tell Mama I'm sorry, I don't think that will help, her feelings will still be hurt."

"But, Papa won't hurt Mama's feelings anymore?"

"I won't."

"Well then Mama will forgive you!"

It's Sylphy after all, I should have understood that from the beginning.

I need to be home for her.

In this kind of situation, I'm probably missing something.

Even if I think I understand, her feelings may be different.

She's been enduring for a long time.

When I left her while she was pregnant to go help Paul.

When I married Roxy, then Eris.

Time and time again, instead of exploding, she's only shown understanding.

I've been allowed to do as I like.

Once again, she's enduring.

When she heard that I hadn't even thought of a name, she was holding herself back.

Surely, even now, she's still enduring it.

I'm the one making her endure.

Everything's fine for now.

However a time will come when her patience reaches its limit.

Just like water overflows from a cup, there's also a limit on what a person can put up with.

At that time, I'll lose Sylphy.

Just like in the diary, she'll up and disappear.

That would be awful.

I want to spend the rest of my life with her.

Together, through the painful times too.

That's just my own selfishness.

Even if she falls out of love with me,

At the very least I want to give Sylphy a sense of security.

I wonder what I should do.

Part 3

While I was worrying over those kinds of things, the delivery date rapidly approached. We're expecting it in the next week or so.

Sylphy has been spending her time as if nothing had happened.

In fact, I was starting to think it wasn't such a big deal either.

She's not the type to hold a grudge for this kind of thing.

Perhaps the other day she was just disappointed, and didn't take things too seriously.

I don't think things became awkward.

While I was spending as much time as possible with Sylphy, I was desperately thinking of a name for our child.

Just like that, Sylphy started having delivery pains.

Eris had a calm face and took off sprinting to the doctor,

Lilia and Aisha prepared for the delivery,

Roxy was waiting off to the side as an auxiliary healing specialist,

Leo was taken with the children to another room,

And I was next to Sylphy the entire time.

After a little bit, Eris returned with the doctor.

Under her arm that is, his eyes were spinning, but he immediately set out to prepare for the delivery.

Everyone was familiar with the process.

This is Sylphy's second child, my fourth.

If I count the number of births I've witnessed, including Aisha and Norn, it's five.

If I count my previous life, it's a few more.

Even the doctor is a veteran; there isn't a single inexperienced person here.

With this lineup, I can have peace of mind.

And with everyone present, the delivery began.

There was no panic or confusion, everyone was calm and proceeded smoothly...

"Ugh."

When the head crowned, the doctor moaned.

My peace of mind broke in an instant; anxiety is coursing through my body.

Even though I'm accustomed to the process, delivery then birth.

I shouldn't have relaxed my guard.

I know it's not a breech delivery, because the head was crowning...

There's no way it could be a stillbirth.

Roxy stood up with her staff in hand.

"Do we need healing magic?"

"That's not necessary."

As the doctor said that, the delivery continued.

The delivery proceeded smoothly, with Sylphy letting out as little of her voice as she could.

I don't see anything going wrong.

"... Aah~ aah~"

Then, suddenly, in the quiet room, a baby's cries emerged.

The doctor finished delivering the baby without saying anything.

There doesn't seem to be any problem.

But, the doctor's expression is stiff.

Now I see why.

From a glance at the baby, it's obvious.

The reason why the doctor still has a stiff expression, that is.

The baby's hair was the problem.

When Lucy was born, she had a little bit of light brown hair.

Lara was born without any hair.

Arus was born while I was away, but when I first saw him, he had red hair.

"...."

Sylphy's second child.

The baby's hair, was green.

It's not bright enough to be emerald green.

But, it was green.

Almost similar to Sylphy's old...

"That...."

Sylphy's complexion has gone completely blue.

"Ah... Ah... a lie..."

Roxy, Eris, Aisha, Lilia, and I have normal expressions.

In this house, it's not unusual for a child with colorful hair to be born.

And, I'm also good friends with Ruijerd.

I don't see anything wrong with green hair.

But, Sylphy...

For her...

It's different.

"... Congratulations. It's a boy."

"....."

Sylphy looked at the baby with a hopeless face.

The doctor presented the baby, held to his chest, when Sylphy put up her hands like she didn't know what to do.

"Sylphy."

We should be celebrating.

There's no reason not to celebrate.

Out of appreciation for Sylphy, it's necessary to celebrate.

Afterwards, we need to raise him to become a fine man.

With as many smiles as possible.

In order to create a sense of security.

"Everything's fine, it's fine, thank you."

"..... Rudy... I'm sorry."

Before I could say anything else, Sylphy replied.

"There's no reason to apologize, so--"

As I said that, as if her battery suddenly died, she lost all of her strength.

I caught the baby as he slipped from her grasp.

"Eh?"

"Rudy! Please move!"

Roxy and the doctor suddenly pushed me out of the way.

Sylphy had lost consciousness, they were checking on her condition.

I can't seem to do anything but look on, stunned.

"She's only fainted."

A feeling of relief filled the room at the doctor's words.

I was still frozen in place, holding my naked baby.

Unable to move an inch, just standing there.

Aisha approached with a cloth.

"Oniichan, we need to wrap the baby in this."

"Y-yeah."

As Aisha said that, I took the cloth.

Sylphy was uneasy.

She's had a vague sense of anxiety about her.

And, her uneasiness was proved right when she saw her child's hair was green.

As if she had finally snapped under the tension, or whether her stress had reached a limit, she fainted.

If I'd been better at providing her with a sense of security, things might have gone differently.

I'm sorry.

But, I also feel as if this is a sort of blessing.

Certainly, he has green hair, but there's nothing wrong with that.

Everything went smoothly.

This is my fourth child. I've properly thought of a name.

"... You, why are you here?"

Eris, who was sitting in the corner of the room, abruptly asked.

She was asking me.

I've been acting cowardly, and Eris responded with harsh words.

With that feeling in the pit of my stomach, I turned around.

"Huh?"

That wasn't it.

She wasn't referring to me.

There's a strange guy in the room.

Blonde hair. Wearing a white school uniform, with a buttoned shirt and long pants.

And, a familiar yellow fox-motif mask.

"Arumanfi...?"

Arumanfi was watching me patiently.

Or, more accurately, my baby.

He was patiently watching my green haired baby.

"Rudeus Greyrat. Perugia-sama requests your presence at the sky castle."

It would seem I've been summoned by Perugia.

Chapter 7

Naming

Part 1

--- Sylphiette's Point of View [64] ---

I had a dream.

Around the time when Rudi went to the Kingdom of the Dragon King.

A child was crying inside that dream.

A child with green hair was crying.

There was some kind of black shadow in the surroundings.

The black shadow surrounded the child and threw something like black lumps at him.

The child was desperately trying to run away, but the black shadow persistently chased after him.

But there was a light ahead of that child.

The child approached the light and the light surrounded the child; the light then drove the black shadow away by throwing a ball of light towards it.

The child was tenderly wrapped up by the light and the child slept peacefully.

When I had that dream, I thought that it was a dream of the past.

That the dream was of the old days when I was being bullied by the village's children.

I thought that 'I really love Rudi, don't I' after having such a dream at this point.

I writhed like a little girl on the bed after thinking that.

Several months after that.

During the time when Rudi went to the Demon Continent.

I had a similar dream again.

But it was a little different from that time.

The child having green hair.

It wasn't my face.

The child who had Rudi's face was being chased by the black shadow.

And for some reason, there was no light ahead of that child's escape.

I rushed towards that child in a hurry and decided to protect him from the black shadow.

I tried to drive it away bare handed as I couldn't use magic within the dream.

The black shadow had been sticking to me and didn't easily vanish.

The child was trembling in my arms.

When I had that dream, I got anxious that something might have happened to Rudi.

He might have gotten injured or had been captured.

Even though Eris and Roxy were there.....

I seriously started considering how should I make my move if that had happened.

In the end, he came back the other day and my anxiety was liquefied, but.....

In exchange for that, a different anxiety rose within me.

The stomach which was getting bigger.

I thought whether the dream was this child's within this stomach.

However, I immediately considered it as needless anxiety.

Rudi will definitely protect the kids.

This child is sure to have the light.

I thought that I had become just a little nervous because of pregnancy.

I immediately forgot about the dreams.

And then Rudi came back from the Demon Continent.

I tried asking him about the child's name.

It had been 6 months since I asked him to think about it.

It would have been fine if I asked after the birth, but since he was leaving on a trip again I wanted to ask beforehand.

".....I'm sorry. I haven't thought about a name yet."

At that time, the thing about the dream crossed my mind.

The figure of the child coiled about by the black shadow and no one would come to his rescue.

I thought that perhaps this child won't be loved by Rudi.

'No, that couldn't possibly be' I immediately thought that, but---

As expected, I had a dream the evening of that very day.

The black shadow was swarming the child who was too far away from my hands reach.

I desperately ran and tried to save him.

But I couldn't make it.

After I finally arrived, the black shadow was disappearing and the child was dead.

I was drenched in sweat after I woke up.

It's just a dream, I'm only nervous.

I could only convince myself of that.

But I ended up thinking about various things after all.

If a child with green hair is really born.....

That child would undoubtedly be persecuted.

Just like I was.

But Rudi will definitely protect that child even if he has green hair.

It's the same for Roxy and Eris as well.

Even though I know that, just why isn't my anxiety disappearing?

I arrived unexpectedly faster at the answer.

I've heard it.

About Laplace's factor.

About the reason my hair color was green.

About why Rudi for a period of time was feeling a little anxious about that matter.

If the child born is Laplace.

What would Rudi do?

It's a little different this time around, but Rudi was originally assembling war potential to fight Laplace.

If my child is Laplace, then what would become of Rudi's work.....?

.....What to do?

By no means do I not have faith in him.

I trust him.

But, what should I do?

What do I want him to do?

I started losing sleep every night as that thing kept spiraling inside my head.

Eventually I concluded that "A child with green hair won't necessarily be born."

It's just; it would have been better if it wasn't green hair.

But it was green.

--- Rudeus's Point of View ---

We named the baby Sieghart.

Baby girls Lucy and Lara were named after their parents, and baby boy Arus was named after the Hero of the Past, so that's why we named him after the Immortal Hero Siegfried with regards to the previous era. ^[65]

At first we were going along with that, but if it's Ranoa, then the names "Something-hart" were numerous, so we quickly changed it.

His nickname is Sieg.

Sieg looked normal.

Frequently cried and often slept.

He peed and pooped.

At least he's far more normal than Lara, who doesn't cry too much and Arus, who cries if I hold him.

A reincarnated person.....

No, let's stop with the obscurement.

I don't think he looks like Laplace.

"Though I am looking at him.....what do you think about my family's child...."

It's been three days since then.

At late night.

The one sitting before me is Orsted.

Orsted is in front of Sieg, who is soundly sleeping within the basket in my home.

Not long ago he was crying, but now he's fast asleep.

Orsted looks somewhat drowsy as well.

By the way, Eris is standing behind Orsted.

Even though it's fine not to be so vigilant about it, she has been keeping her hand on the sword on her back.

"....Were you not able to comprehend my words?"

"No! Of course, I obviously understand your words, I believe them! That's right, Laplace certainly hasn't been born yet!"

"....."

"But, look, were you not talking about it before. That if Pax is dead, then Laplace's place of birth becomes unknown. Which means! My existence made things like that, because of Hitogami, Laplace of this period was, so it could be...."

Orsted gave out a sigh.

With a face like 'Do I have to explain this again?'

"Laplace's place of birth becomes unknown because of Pax's death.....but Laplace's factor hasn't been converged yet. It's possible after 50 years, but no matter how you see it, Laplace's resurrection isn't going to happen any time soon."

I don't remember hearing anything about the convergence.....

But when I believe that.

"Which means this child is?"

"Just a cute baby."

While saying that Orsted tried to extend his hand towards Sieg, but stopped after hearing Eris moving her sword.

It's alright if it's just a pat on the head.....

"Then, what about this green hair?"

Sieg's hair color is green.

A color which is quite similar to former Sylphy.

"It's only green. Laplace's factor or just hereditary....that's probably all."

It's just green.....huh.

It won't particularly become small even if we get closer to it, but.....

"This child is not Laplace. I can guarantee you that."

".....Thank you very much."

Despite giving my thanks, I still have some doubt left.

Orsted isn't flawless.

Even if he says it was like that in the previous loops, this loop has too many irregularities.

In fact, even Orsted can cause some miscalculations.

So if Perugia properly examines him and he really turns out to be Laplace...

That possibility exists.

Or the possibility of Perugia misrecognizing him also exists.

The fact is what a person says and does is never absolute. ^[66]

"If it's possible, would you be able to accompany us when I go to Perugia-sama's place?

That way if he really does turn out to be Laplace, won't you please protect us?"

".....I guess it's alright."

Yeah.

Perugius won't be able to gain an upper-hand if Orsted is standing behind me.

Alright it's settled.

As for this, that is.

"....."

"Why the long face? Is there still something more?"

"No..."

Since then, Sylphy was noticeably depressed.

On the surface she behaves the same as usual, but she often looks gloomy.

She might be feeling responsible for giving birth to a green-haired child.

Of course, no one in the family cares about that.

Only Roxy seemed to understand that scarce feeling, since I glanced at a counseling-like scene between them.

But Sylphy remained depressed.

Even I talked to her about one thing or another.

So what do I do to bring back Sylphy's smiling face?

I don't know that.

"It's because of the family's circumstances, that is why....."

"I see. So then, how soon can you come to Perugius-sama's place?"

"We'll come when Sylphy stabilizes."

I made Arumanfi wait.

That the child has just been born and it's impossible to come so soon.

Arumanfi left after saying a short "I understand," but Perugius might be highly anticipating me.

He even revealed himself with the fastest speed possible.....^[67]

Orsted said that my child isn't Laplace.

Be that as it may, Perugius won't consent to it even if he's informed unilaterally.

Not until he's seen it with his own eyes.

It might be hard, but let's take Sylphy as well.
I had a hunch that it would be better like that.

Part 2

20 days passed.

Sylphy's physical condition stabilized as well.

There are no problems with the child as of now.

Sylphy has been feeling depressed as usual.

With a gloomy face, she has been tightly holding the baby during the daytime.

Many times, her expression looked as if she wouldn't hand this child over to anyone and was worried too much.

"Sylphy, I intend to show Sieg to Perugius-sama."

When I suggested such a thing to her, she held Sieg tightly with a frightened face.

".....No."

As if she had turned back to her childhood, a frail attitude.

Moreover, that expression was not aiming for me during the old days.

But aiming for the ones who bullied her.

"Why.....would you say such a thing.....?"

"So that I can make you realize that our child isn't Laplace by Perugius-sama."

Sylphy casted her eyes down.

".....If he turns out to be Laplace, what will you do?"

"Eh? As I said before, even Orsted-sama says that he's not Laplace....."

"But the possibility of him being wrong is there, right?"

Well, even Orsted isn't flawless.

It might be possible that he was carried away by Sieg's cuteness and said that.

I don't think that's possible, but.....

"At that time....."

"At that time?"

"I will protect Sieg even if the Sky Fortress falls."

Sylphy casted her eyes down again after hearing those words.

And murmured an "OK" with a faint voice.

Part 3

And thus, we had decided to proceed towards the Sky Fortress.

The members were me, Sylphy holding Sieg, Eris, Orsted, and incidentally Zanoba.

I decided to take someone along who can easily persuade Perugius just in case.

".....Welcome. Please come."

The reaction of Sylvaril, who encountered such a large family, was the same as always.

Firstly, a sincere respect towards Zanoba, Eris, and Sylphy.

Just an exterior respect for me.

An unpleasant attitude towards Orsted.

Just as always.

"Well then, this way please. Perugius-sama awaits."

And thus, we go towards the Audience room through the usual route.

There is no conversation.

Sylphy, who is holding Sieg, is walking beside me.

Eris is walking as if to protect her with her hand laid on the pommel of her sword.

Zanoba, who looks slightly tense after hearing the situation, is walking behind us with Orsted in tow, whose face cannot be seen because of the Helmet.

We go past the door which was praised before by Zanoba without any change in that formation.

Illusions of white particles could be seen coming out of Sylphy and Sieg.

They might be coming out of me as well.

I thought it was a little strange that nothing came out from Orsted.

He doesn't have the Laplace's factor?

"....."

Sylvaril looked at us silently.

She's smoothly proceeding before us without accidentally saying anything particular.

"Look, Sylphy, it's different as we expected."

".....Yeah."

Sylvaril is walking without looking back.

Passing the corridor which is lined up with stylish interiors, we stand before a splendid door.

Now that I look at it, the door still looks in good taste.

Is it because he looked around the castles throughout the world.....?

I can understand why Zanoba kept praising this castle that day.

Sylvaril opened that splendid door.

"Please advance."

We entered the audience room on Sylvaril's call.

The usual scene is spread out there as before.

A large chandelier as if propped up like a large tree.

Curtains painted with the crest of the Human Race and the Dragon Race.

12 men and women wearing masks are standing on both sides of the red velvet carpet.

The Dragon King with silver hair who sat on the throne.

Gorgeousness and greatness.

A scene that will make you forget about its divinity before you even finish talking about it.

[68]

You won't find such an audience room even if you search the entire world.

And to top it all off with Sylvaril, it becomes perfect.....

.....Huh, there's one person more.

Ah, Nanahoshi is mixed in.

What's she trying to do now?

"So you've come, Rudeus."

"Yes. I've kept you waiting. Perugius-sama."

I bow my head while standing.

Sylphy, Eris, and Zanoba all have fallen to their knees, but I'm just standing.

I had better fallen to my knees too, but being Orsted's subordinate, I've been constantly taking lesson these days to not lower my back too much.

Sure enough, Sylvaril was a little offended, but Perugius doesn't seem to mind.

But he looks displeased today.

"You've made me wait for quite a bit."

".....That is because my child had just been born."

"Arumanfi was telling me that. That's why I waited. I wouldn't have tolerated if it had been a foolish reason."

As one would expect from a tolerant gentleman.

But considering that, he looks displeased.

He has been tapping the armrest on the throne quite restlessly.

"That expression, this occasion, you seem to know the reason why I summoned you here."

"Yes."

"And then with these members, you've resolved yourself to fight unhesitatingly depending in which way the conversation flows."

".....Yes."

Perugius is glaring at Orsted with a loathsome face.

Orsted's face can't be seen with the black helmet on, but he probably has that angry look as usual.

"However, Perugius-sama, is it a must to fight?" [69]

"Ho! A must to fight, huh! I see, this is why your speech has such confidence in it!"

"Who knows, but, there is no reason to fight.....Sylphy."

I told Sylphy to get up and showed the baby held within her breast.

"Please look at it. This is my 4th child."

".....What about it?"

"Everything about it. Did you not speak of it before? To bring the child here if a son is born to Sylphy and me."

Perugius' movements come to a halt.

The tapping of the finger came to a halt.

I don't care, I'll continue.

"Even Orsted-sama has seen him, but this child isn't Laplace.

Nevertheless, you won't accept it until you have seen him personally.

As for me, I thought whether it would be fine to show him or not but, for the sake of Perugius-sama's friendship in the future, I judged that it would be better to let that thought pass for now."

"....."

Perugius kept his silence.

"However, if Orsted-sama had mistaken his judgment and this child turns out to Laplace, then...."

"....."

"I will fight."

Perugius's eyebrows twitched.

"Weren't you visiting various places for the sake of fighting Laplace 80 years from now?"

"That's right."

"So you will fight in order to protect that Laplace?"

It's contradictory if you say it now.

If this child is Laplace, then I will protect him.

All of the things I've done up till now will completely be in vain.

"After this child matures and if he really causes a war against the Human Race, at that time.....I will take it upon myself to deal with the preparations for the sake of that time."

"Intending to nip the bud, is it?"

".....Yes."

If my son is Laplace.

I think I didn't give it too much thought despite thinking of it as a very scary thing.

Laplace will wage war 80 years from now.

For that reason, I went to each nation to appeal to them so that the burden on Orsted becomes lighter as much as possible.

But wait.

What if I can stop that war?

What happens if I recover Laplace's consciousness and stop the war?

The child has only just born; there is plenty of time for persuasion.

That is to say, we can carry out training for the sake of the future.

If we teach Laplace everything so far and everything from now on, he could be treated as Orsted's comrade.....

No.

Orsted said this.

That Laplace must be killed.

It's probably for the sake of obtaining the Dragon Treasure.

Which means, Orsted will eventually come for my son's life, and that means.....

.....Shit, aren't all the doors blocked then?

No, calm down.

I should be able to see what I want to do if I think in order.

"I will always stand beside my family. I became Orsted-sama's subordinate because there was a person who hurt my family. If even that Orsted-sama will hurt my family, then I will fight him."

"Even if your son becomes the cause for that?"

".....I intend to properly teach him how to judge good and evil.

The kids are still small, but at least until they become adults.....until they become 15 years old, I'll protect them.

Afterwards, if he still disregards my words..... at that time, I will take responsibility and deal it with myself."

"Hou, deal with it, huh, how will you 'deal' with it specifically?"

".....Re-educate him as much as I can."

As much as I can.

Not being able to do the duty even though they're kids.

No....

"You won't say that you'll.....kill him?"

"Given that no matter what kind of life he lives, if he makes a mistake, then I want to give him a chance to start over."

I can't say it like that.

I don't want to say any further than this.

I don't even want to think about the future where Lucy, Lara, and Arus oppose Orsted and are killed in cold blood.

But no matter how splendid the training I give them, if the case is no good, then it's no good.

A person can't be raised as one would expect them to be.

Given that even I wasn't raised as I expected.

Even though he's a child, it's impossible to raise him as a different individual would expect.

That's why I think, I should at least give him a chance.

It's about finding common ground.

"I don't have a child of my own. That is why I cannot understand that way of thinking. It's like your way of thinking is 'You reap what you sow'."

Perugius laughed while saying that.

"However, in order to protect your wives, you became a foolish person who recklessly challenged Orsted to a fight. It's obvious I can't understand. I can't understand, but.....I understand that you have strong faith."

Perugius descends from his throne and slowly walks towards us.

And then said.

A shocking brief comment.

"I can't understand what kind of misunderstanding you have, but I already knew that the child wasn't Laplace."

It was until after 5 seconds that we understood his words.

".....Ah, is that so?"

"Arumafi is my eyes.

I shouldn't be able to mistake him for Laplace.

The eye color is different. Even his magic capacity isn't much impressive.

And even that annoying curse isn't there.....a curse that can shake the innermost depths of one's heart."

Which means since the moment of the childbirth scene, he already knew that my child wasn't Laplace, is that it?

"In other words, this isn't related at all, but did Arumanfi trespass during the private childbirth scene?"

"I give my apology for that matter. It seems he was unexpectedly summoned during the worst timing. Although if your child had turned out to be Laplace, it would have been either the best timing or a fine ordeal."

Ehhhh.

Say that first if it's so.

What's with that?

Ehhhh.

"Let me see."

Perugius stopped before Sylphy.

And extended both of his hands towards her.

"Let me hold that baby as well."

"...."

Sylphy hugged Sieg close to her while being vigilant.

But when I put a hand on her shoulder, she thought a little bit and then handed Sieg over to Perugius.

Perugius held Sieg gently in his hands.

Firmly and gently using his hands as if handling a work of art.

Sieg looked long and hard at Pegius' face.

"Hrm.....green hair and slightly pointed ears. Eyes with a glint, but gives out an affectionate impression, a fine child."

"T-thank you very much."

On thanking, Perugius nodded with a 'yeah'.

"Alright, then let's bestow him with the name 『Saladin』 ." [70]

".....Eh?"

Sylphy looked at Perugius with a blank face.

"What are you so befuddled about? Didn't you promise before? That if a son is born, I'll name him."

Did we promise something like that?

No, but, I think like we did.

Certainly, I feel like I remember about him incidentally saying to bring him here.

"But, that, this child is....."

"No need for thanks, accept it as a modest gift from me."

Perugius said that arbitrarily, returned Sieg to Sylphy, and then turned back on his heel.
This child has been pretty much named Sieghart, which is a very fine name.

What to do?

I can't reject it now.

Well it's fine.

Sieghart Saladin Greyrat.

The name doesn't sound so poor; it feels powerful.

Speaking of the name given by Perugius should be prestigious.

Yup, it's not poor.

I thought it wasn't bad when I said it.

"Well then, let's move on to the main subject."

Perugius said while heavily sitting down on the throne.

Main subject?

What was the main subject?

Ah, that's right.

Perugius's business was not related to my child – then that means...

A different errand came up, so he summoned me.

"Rudeus Greyrat."

He's looking down on me with a completely different severe gaze than before.

What is it?

What did I do now?

"You bastard, you joined an alliance with Atofe, didn't you?"

Ah.

That....

Perugius and Atofe are on bad terms.

It would have been better if I had sent a word to Perugius before calling out to Atofe.....

"In spite of the war against Laplace, you went ahead and called out to her first.....why didn't you call out to me?"

"That is, because....."

"But it's fine. Listening to your faith just now made me feel gratified. I'll ignore it. From the start, I intended to fight against Laplace by myself."

Is that fine?

"Therefore, there's just one thing for you to do."

Perugius jerked his chin and a girl came out before us.

A girl around the age of 16 years old is wearing a white mask.

A girl who remained young, and before we noticed, was even younger than even me and Sylphy.

Nanahoshi Shizuka

She, who was nonchalantly blended within the 12 subordinates, came out before us and removed her mask.

And said with a meek face.

"The magic circle for my repatriation has been completed."

"I see, finally."

The answer that came from the back was from Orsted.

Nanahoshi tightly grasped her fist in front of her bosom after seeing Orsted.

"Yes. Orsted. Finally.....though it's still not perfect yet."

"So you did it."

Orsted's words were warm.

Those were familiar words, but for this reason only, Orsted congratulated her from the bottom of his heart.

"Yes.....Yes!"

Nanahoshi's voice was getting excited.

She looked up and stopped her warped face, which was just about to overflow from tears. Even I felt like crying.

Repatriation Teleportation Magic Circle.

The thing Nanahoshi was craving for.

It's been 10 odd years since she's been in this world; she has been living up till now for this moment only.

She only aimed to go back to her home as she overlooked her violent homesickness.

From a concept to hypothesis and from dismissal to conception again.

And then putting the technique into practice after the theory is completed and repeating the experiment over and over again.

It's been almost 5 years since she came to Perugius's place in pursuit of knowledge.

It's a long time.

And thus it has finally completed.

"Rudeus. You might have hated being summoned because you've been busy, right?"

"No."

So I was summoned because of Nanahoshi.

I've certainly been busy these days, but.....there's nothing to hate about it.

I would rather apologize for not being able to help you out up till now.

"Congratulations about your child."

"Thank you very much."

"I was somewhat surprised.....you've properly thought things through....."

Properly....huh?

I wonder about that.

It's about me, so I can't help but think that I can't arrive at a conclusion.

"We need a fairly large magical power for the final experiment. You should be busy with a lot of things, but please lend me your power."

Nanahoshi bowed her head while saying that.

Those eyes had power.

The final step.

With a face as if she's seen the goal.

"Of course."

"It might take 1 or 2 months, are you all right with that?"

".....It's fine."

A month, huh.

I have a motive to refuse, but there's no reason to refuse. ^[71]

I want to say that I want her to wait until we defeat Gisu, but I don't want to put it in words that she's an unpleasant person.

"Thank you very much."

Nanahoshi again bowed while saying that.

And then suddenly looked in Sylphy's direction.

She's still wearing the anxious face.

Nanahoshi ran towards her and whispered something into her ears.

Sylphy was shook up with a start, and looked at Nanahoshi with a surprised face.

Nanahoshi nodded, and Sylphy who was giving glances towards me also nodded.

"Well then, let's move to the Magic Circle after this."

I don't know what she talked about, but Nanahoshi declared this.
The audience was over.

Part 4

After that, I gave Perugius one more greeting and left the audience room.

It had been decided that I will go towards Nanahoshi's lab in order to listen to her difficult explanation.

"....."

When we were walking through the corridor, I was suddenly caught by the hem of my clothes from behind.

It was Sylphy.

She was looking down as usual and murmured "Rudi" with a faint voice.

I silently gave the signal to the others to move along with my eyes.

I stopped and everybody went away; now with just the two of us, I turned around and put a hand on her shoulder.

I gently hugged her slender body so as not to crush Sieg.

"Rudi.....sorry, for things. I became slightly anxious. After looking at the green hair, I recalled the old days and pondered what to do after this. I was thinking that maybe this child won't be blessed by others....."

"It can't be helped. Anyone would become anxious. Even I forgot about thinking up a name for him."

"Yeah.....In addition to this, you were constantly going on trips with Roxy and Eris recently, right? That's why I thought 'Will I have to protect this child alone'....."

"There is no need for that!"

When I forcefully denied it, Sylphy was surprised for a moment, but then became shy while laughing.

"Yeah. I know. I knew. Sorry."

"Ah, no, it's fine even if you don't apologize....."

"I just became a little weak."

Sylphy gently stroked Sieg's hair.

Sieg had been sleeping for a while now. I wonder when he slept.

"But it's alright now. For some reason, I was relieved after watching you just now. You said that you will seriously protect them."

Was there a relief factor somewhere within me a few minutes ago?

It was a grand fruitless effort after all; I declared that I intended to train a kid even if it was impossible. I think it was the figure of a fool who gave out a halfhearted answer....

Anyhow, Sylphy was feeling clear-headed.

"Um.....Sylphiette-san."

"What is it, Rudeus-san?"

"Is it alright to get angry at me because I forgot about the naming of our child?"

"Eeeh.....but I'm not really angryyy.....if I were to name something, anxiety or despair would be more appropriate."

Sylphy said while scratching behind her ear.

That face wasn't gloomy anymore.

What she's saying was awfully stirring my heart, but at least it's the usual Sylphy.

".....Ah, I see, it would have been better if I had gotten angry. Let's see, I'll get angry next time. It's no good if you forget about me and our child!"

"Understood."

I was scolded with a 'No!' ^[72]

At any rate, looks like it's fine now.

Work and children.

It's difficult to manage both at the same time.

If the situation calms down a little after the matter with Gisu gets settled, then I want to look after the kids a bit more.

"Well, should we go then? You have to help out Nanahoshi too."

"Ah.....now that you mention it, what did she tell you in the end?"

"It's a secret."

Sylphy laughed shyly.

I returned a smile, caught up to everyone, and started walking.

Along with Sylphy.

Chapter 8

Parallel World Teleportation Magic Device

Part 1

Flying fortress, basement level 15.

Descending the stairs, one immediately comes into a wide entrance hall.

There, that magic circle is set up.

Teleportation magic circle.

However, its form bears no resemblance to the ones in my memory.

Furthermore, it is wonderfully enormous.

It's around 50 meters in diameter, and 1 meter tall.

It is composed of 1-meter-square lithographs, each 10cm tall.

They are stacked 10 high, and those stacks are repeated in 50 rows and columns.

In addition, above it spans a gigantic arch.

The interior of the arch is carved with closely-packed designs, so it is also probably part of the magic circle.

An extremely three-dimensional magic circle.

No, maybe it should be called a magic device.

"Wow... this'll make Cliff feel bitter."

Zanoba let out a voice of admiration.

The magic device is not only large, but also delicately and precisely carved.

At the very least, me and Zanoba aren't able to make anything like it.

It's probably too difficult even for Roxy, who has been researching magic circles recently.

Maybe Cliff... but even Cliff doesn't have this much experience drawing magic circles.

"It's magnificent craftsmanship."

Perugius threw out his chest as if it were his own achievement.

However, I can understand that feeling.

For one's disciple to have created such a device, it's only natural for the one who taught her teleportation magic to feel proud.

Although I'm sure Perugius himself was involved in its construction.

"How is it, Orsted?"

"For it to be something of this magnitude... I'm astonished."

Even Orsted was admiring the magic device.

Using 25000 lithographs, a three-dimensional magic circle.

Even Orsted has never seen anything like it.

Even the Mad Dragon King's automata had at most 50 parts, and the parts themselves were much smaller in size.

Nanahoshi probably combined magic circles with absolutely no thought given to how large it grows.

"Right? Look at that arch."

"Is that also a part of it? It doesn't seem to be attached, though."

"No, it's something else. That's a device for confirming whether it succeeded. You are aware that teleportation leaves traces of mana behind, right?"

"Yeah."

"That changes depending on the type of the teleportation magic circle. By measuring it, we can determine whether the parallel-world teleportation was a success or not."

"... Is such a thing possible?"

"Fufufu, I never thought the day would come when I could teach something to you, who holds such extensive knowledge."

"..... No, that's not true, I've learned a lot of things from you... a lot of things."

"Hn. How pretentious. Even though you acted as if you knew everything from the moment we met."

Perugius and Orsted were having a friendly conversation.

To the Perugius who was proud at having outwitted Orsted, Orsted's voice held hints of nostalgia.

It was also slightly bitter.

"Rudeus."

Nanahoshi turned around, and came over to me.

"To start with, let's send over something simple. After that, by analyzing the teleportation magic circle's characteristic mana remnants, the monitoring magic circle will adjust the magic circle for parallel-world teleportation. After that succeeds, we'll send over a living thing, and finally myself. Is that good?"

"It's good, but please excuse me from another teleportation disaster."

"Don't worry. There's no need to worry about that."

Nanahoshi repeatedly said not to worry.

That actually makes me worry more.

For the record, she did give me a detailed report earlier, but it has way too much information, and I haven't finished scanning it yet.

However, Nanahoshi has performed numerous experiments to ensure that she doesn't cause a teleportation incident.

Me and Sylphy helped with that as well.

"Are you confident?"

"I am."

Then, I'll believe in you.

You seem to be confident enough.

"Well then, shall we begin?"

"Yes. Then, starting with an apple..."

Nanahoshi probably prepared one ahead of time.

From the basket that was left in the corner of the room, she produced an apple.

Holding the apple, she climbed onto the magic device, trotted to its center, and placed it there.

"Perugius-sama, if you will."

"Uh huh."

Perugius moved to the opposite end of the magic circle.

No, not just Perugius.

His servants moved one by one into evenly-spaced intervals around the magic circle.

Only Sylvaril moved instead to the base of the arch.

"Rudeus goes over here."

At Nanahoshi's instruction, I stood opposite to Perugius.

Right there were two hand-shaped marks that all but said "Place hands here."

"At my signal, insert mana into there. As much as you possibly can."

"Roger that."

As told, I put my hands down.

It's kind of exciting.

I turn my head and look over to Sylphy.

She was staring blankly at the magic circle while whispering with Zanoba.

They also took the bait^[73], so they must be interested.

Eris wasn't taking part in the conversation.

She was in her usual pose, looking up at the arch with a seemingly proud expression.

She probably simply likes big things.

The Orsted who's sluggishly standing behind her is...

"Perugius-sama! Please begin!"

"Yeah."

Whoops, I need to concentrate.

Even though I said concentrate, I just need to pour in mana.

In any case, just concentrate.

"... We're starting."

Perugius and his servants simultaneously touched the magic circle.

In the next instant, the edge of the magic circle faintly gave off light.

However, it was only near the edge.

The tiny magic circles around the edge are strongly shining, but the center remains dark.

A failure?

"Rudeus."

"Yes."

As told, I send mana through both hands.

The next instant. My right hand felt as if it was sticking to the magic circle.

I could tell that my mana was being sucked out with frightening vigor.

For some reason it's only my right hand; mana is being sucked from my left hand as well, but it's weak compared to the right hand.

Should it be strong in the left hand, too?

The moment I thought that, the amount being sucked from my left hand explosively increased.

In exchange, the amount being drawn from my right hand diminished.

Right, left, right, left.

The strength at which mana was being drawn out alternated.

Feeling it carefully, the strength at the fingertips and palm differed slightly.

However, rather than mechanical, I could feel as if it were being manually controlled.

The one who is controlling it... is Perugius, huh?

I can't see his face, but it seems like his job wasn't just starting up the magic circle.
And then, the ones assisting him are his servants.
It's not automatic once started, but needs to be managed; it's correct to call it a magic device.

The radiance of the magic circle increased.

While changing color from blue, to green, to white, the room was filled with an overwhelming brightness.

It's already too bright to see anything.

Is this the intensity of the magic circle?

I've never seen a magic circle this bright.

No.

I've seen it once before.

That was, during the teleportation incident...

Patsu——^[74]

A sound rang out, and the light disappeared.

No, it didn't disappear completely.

The arch.

Only the arch's light continued to faintly illuminate the surroundings.

And then, directly beneath the arch.

The very center of the magic circle.

The place where the apple was.

Where the apple *used to be*.

In that place, something bluish-white was remaining.

A bluish-white, particulate something.

The particles lightly floated into the surroundings and slowly disappeared.

"The experiment was a success."

"..."

Nobody answered Sylvaril's words.

Without waiting for a response, she filled something in on a nearby piece of paper.

"From here, we will analyze the mana traces and increase the certainty of parallel-world teleportation. However, the data for that analysis is already gathered, so it will not take much time."

While listening to Nanahoshi's explanation, I removed my hands from the magic circle.

"Rudeus, are you okay?"

When she asked me, I thought back to the mana from earlier.

Only one time. With just one or two activations, the mana drain was that much.^[75]

If I were to do that repeatedly, it would certainly suck me dry.

"I'm okay, but doing that repeatedly would be impossible."

"I see... Thank you for your work. I pretty much intend to go at a pace of once every 1 or 2 days. Go rest for today."

Nanahoshi said that and bowed her head, then ran over in Perugius's direction.

While discussing this and that with the research team, she was jotting down notes.

She'll probably consolidate the reports for this experiment and make use of them for the next one.

The parallel-world teleportation system itself is complete.

All that's left is to put the finishing touches on that arch, and while analyzing the mana traces and observations, change the teleported objects to be progressively more Nanahoshi-like.

That will take around one more month.

It's troubling to take that much time while Gisu is moving in the background... but there's no helping it.

This is the result of failing to make Perugius a comrade.^[76]

Part 2

Since the experiment started, two weeks have passed.

While I went back and forth between my house and the flying fortress, the experiments continued.

The experiments use up quite a bit of mana.

It's questionable if that much mana can be recovered in a single day.

For the sake of the experiment, I decided that even if someone attacked with this timing, I would try to use as little mana as possible.

Once I decided that, I immediately became bored.

No, it's not like I had nothing to do.

Talking with Zanoba about doll sales, talking with Roxy about improving the Magic Armor, using the lithographs to exchange information with my collaborators, talking with Orsted about our future plans without results, and such.

There aren't many free days.

However, compared to this past year and a half where I continuously traveled, it's pretty easy.

There are times when the mercenary corps branches or the doll sales offices contact me through the communication lithograph to make a decision, but in Sharia, there are many people that I can consult with, and I don't need to think of everything from the ground up.

Furthermore, travel doesn't take much time, so I can spend time with the children before going to bed.

I talk about the day's happenings to Zenith, who can read minds, talk about Cliff with Elinalise when she visits, help teach Lara to talk, watch over Lucy's studies, be made to cry by Arus.

Days with few worries.

I wonder if this is what it feels like to be an office worker who works every day of the year taking an extended vacation for the first time in a while.

I can somehow understand why Orsted hasn't left Sharia recently.

There are times when I wonder if this is okay, but humans need times to rest, and maybe I was in need of some relaxation.

If there was late night fun in bed it would be awesome, but the abstinent Rudeus needs to have patience until he accomplishes his goal.

Part 3

Now then, after various things, a month has passed.

The experiments finished in the blink of an eye.

The experiments went very well.

As the experiments progressed, the objects sent to the parallel world changed from fruits to animals.

The animals used were larger and larger, and each time the magic circle was adjusted, over and over again.

Eventually a horse around three times larger than Nanahoshi was sent to the parallel world.

The results of the arch's measurements:

The horse was transferred to [a land between 10 meters and 30 meters above sea level in the parallel world].

That is the limit of our ability to measure from here.

There's no way to tell from the mana remains whether it flew to Japan or America.

When adapting the same world teleportation circle patterns to parallel world teleportation, all that can be determined is [whether it went to land or sea] and [the general altitude of the land].

However, by specifying dry land 10~30 meters above sea level, the chances of dying instantly upon teleportation is greatly lowered.

Although we say parallel world, there's no guarantee that it's the same parallel world that we know.

Of course, since we summoned things like PET bottles from there, the probability is high. But there is no definitive proof.

It's possible that it's actually a different world that is very similar to the one we know.

Even if it is our old world, with vague constraints like land 10~30 meters above sea level, there's a high chance of being sent to a distant foreign country.

And then, there's the road home.

Although there's a good chance of making it to Japan if she teleports with a large amount of food and water, warm clothing, and something that can be exchanged for money... it'll be a rough trip.

However, even then she's going.

She's already resolved herself for whatever may happen.

All that's left is to send Nanahoshi herself.

Taking my mana levels into consideration, the main event will take place in three days.

Part 4

Two days after the experiments concluded.

Nanahoshi came to my house.

"Before I go, I want to use the bath at your house."

Is what she said, but that's probably just an excuse.

"In that case, how about we have a farewell party?"

"No, there's no need for that."

While saying that, Nanahoshi entered the bathroom.

Right now, she's probably all alone in the bathroom.

I don't know what her true motives are.

Maybe she wants to renew her spirits before the event, or maybe she just wants to say goodbye.

Maybe she wants to spend a night with me to make memories of this world, in which case I should go barge into the bathroom... No, there's no way. It's just a delusion brought about by the abstinent Rudeus's overflowing sexual desire. If I actually did that, Sylphy would probably get mad.

Yesterday, it seems like she went around saying farewell to everyone she knows here in Sharia, so she's probably here for that.

For her last night in this world, she decided to come say farewell to my family.

In that case, what I can do is secretly ask Aisha and Lilia to prepare a more extravagant dinner than usual.

Mostly potatoes.

Norn seems to be coming home today, too, so while it may be meager, at least we can send her off warmly.

"Hey, wait!"

"I don't wanna~!"

While I was thinking that and helping Sylphy look after Sieg, Lucy came running into the living room.

Completely naked.

Like that, she jumped up into my lap.

"Papa, save me!"

What kind of event is this?

Being asked for help by a completely nude woman.

Since when has Lucy been such a devilish woman!?

Anyone who refuses isn't a man.

Leave it to me, whether it's a Dragon God or a Demon King, I'll send them flying!

"Rudeus!"

The one who appeared was a red-haired Demon God.

She's also topless.

That's no good, the abstinent Rudeus is weak to that. It hits my weak spot.

"Rudeus, catch Lucy for me. She hates baths. Even though earlier she said that she needs to take a bath since she was sweating during sword practice."

I caught Lucy.

Sorry, Lucy.

However, you need to take a bath after exercising.

"I don't wanna! Red-mama's violent!"

"Violent? Eris... Hitting me is one thing, but you shouldn't hit children."

"How rude, I don't hit her! I'm just a little... bad at washing hair."

So that's it. When I look at Lucy, she puffed out her cheeks and grumbled, "Yeah, when Red-mama washes my hair, stuff gets in my eyes and it hurts."

I see, so that's the reason.

I'm sorry, Eris.

Even you wouldn't hit children.

"Then, Lucy, why don't we help you learn to wash your own hair?"

"... Papa is... Okay."

Lucy began to say something, but held her tongue partway, and was taken back to the bathroom by Eris.

"I think she wanted to be washed by Rudy."

"...Yeah, you may be right."

But Nanahoshi is in the bathroom right now.

There's no way I can get in.

Ah.

Come to think of it, I didn't tell Nanahoshi, did I? That someone else may come in...

No, I think she already knew.

The custom of entering my house's bath with several people has been here since the house was first built.

After all this time, she probably won't complain about someone barging in.

After a little while, Roxy and Norn came home, and went into the bath with Lara.

Switching out with them, Nanahoshi, Eris, and Lucy came back while releasing steam.

Maybe because it was such a long bath, they were all red.

"Guess what, Papa? Nanahoshi-nee-chan taught me how to wash my hair!"

"Is that so? Thank you, Nanahoshi."

"You're welcome."

It seems Nanahoshi was taking care of Lucy.

She may have been talking with Eris in the bath, since there wasn't any dangerous atmosphere.^[77]

As expected, baths are great.

Naked socializing is the way to peace.

Part 5

After me and Sylphy had a bath with Arus, it became dinnertime.

The menu is meat and vegetables and rice.

And then potatoes.

Potato chips and french fries.

Junk food.

Nanahoshi made herself inconspicuous^[78] at the edge of the dining table, but she helped herself to plenty of potatoes.

Even though when she makes it back home, she can have them as much as she wants.

Honestly, what a gluttonous potato woman.

"This food is pretty good."

She didn't eat only potatoes, but had rice as well.

"You can get rice in the flying fortress, right?"

"But I like the rice here more... I think."

"Is that so?"

This rice is a product of Sharia, Aisha rice.

How about we make the brand name 'beautiful maid'?

The under-20-year-old virgin maid('s gathered brawny men bulging with muscles) made it in a rice paddy that they made while dripping with sweat, my favorite masterpiece.

It was made to suit the tongues of the Japanese.

"This is the last time you'll eat this food... make sure to chew it properly when eating."

"Why did you suddenly take a motherly tone?"

After saying that, Nanahoshi continued to eat in silence for a while.

"..."

At some point, her gaze shifted from me to my family.

Lucy is happily talking about recent events, and Norn is listening to her enthusiastically.

Roxy is talking about this and that concerning magic circles with Sylphy.

Eris was feeding Lara, while Aisha did the same for Arus.

Lilia and Zenith are watching over that.

It's a lively scene that I wouldn't have been able to imagine long ago.

Nanahoshi was watching that scene attentively.

As expected, she misses her own home.

While I was thinking that, the meal ended.

After dinner, Nanahoshi kept the children company for a while.

Maybe thanks to the naked socializing, Lucy became attached to Nanahoshi, and when Arus is held by Nanahoshi, he buries his face in her chest with a broad smile.

Lara is the same as always, though...

"Nanahoshi, why don't you spend the night?"

In the end, because of Sylphy's words, Nanahoshi ended up staying over.

It seems like a natural course of events.

However, the guest bedroom was made into a nursery a long time ago.

Since there is no place for guests to stay, Sylphy ended up lending Nanahoshi her room.

Part 6

That night, I talked with Nanahoshi.

In the house where everyone had fallen asleep.

In the living room, two people facing each other, illuminated by the moon shining through the window and the light of the fireplace, talked while slowly drinking alcohol.

It was just useless talk.

Stuff like Perugius's hobbies and how much Sylvaril admires Perugius.

Like how Orsted and Perugius have poor relations, but seem to recognize each other.

It was truly useless idle chatter.

"Rudeus, you're already a splendid adult."

While we were talking, Nanahoshi suddenly said that.

"Is that the case?"

"When I first met you, you were a small child like an elementary school student, and the next time you were like a middle school student. To be honest, there were times when I thought you were younger than me... However, recently you've been very adult-like. You got married, and had kids."

"It's not like getting married and having kids makes you an adult, though."

I honestly don't really understand this adulthood and childhood stuff.

There's no mistake that in my previous life, I was just a big child, though.

"That's true. However, recently you've seemed much more of an adult than me."

"Is that the case?"

"Yeah, you've been thinking about various things such as your children and family... In comparison, I haven't been... I haven't changed at all."

"That's not true."

Nanahoshi has changed a lot from how she used to be.

She used to not let anyone approach her.

The invincible Silent Seven Star-sama.

"If it was the you from long ago, you wouldn't have played with my children or anything like that."

"Is that really so... However, that was because of the time when you saved me. Until then, I had never thought to get involved with the people of this world."

"In the previous world, would you have taken care of children?"

"... Probably... No, I might have been a bit cruel, because of entrance exams. My tests were coming up, too."

Entrance exams and tests.

It's got a nostalgic ring.

"I wonder how many years have passed over there."

"Don't say unpleasant things."

"Oh, sorry."

Since she came here, roughly 15 years have passed.

If 15 years passed over there, she would be like Urashima Tarou.^[79]

It may be possible that as soon as she teleports, Nanahoshi ages 15 years, too.

"However, I somehow get the feeling that not that much time has passed."

"Why?"

With a drunk face, I told her my thoughts.

"Me and Nanahoshi were run over by a truck on the same day, right? However, I came here around 10 years before you. So the flow of time is probably different between here and there. That's why, you don't need to worry."

"Huh, is that s——"

Nanahoshi suddenly put on a thoughtful face.

"..... Wait a minute. What do you mean, we were run over by a truck on the same day?"

Ah.

"Does that mean that you were there?"

"Ummm, that is."

"Wait a minute, huh, wait..."

Nanahoshi put her finger on her forehead and shut her eyes as if trying to remember something.

She suddenly raised her face.

"The fatass from back then."

Ah, Aaaaah... What have I done...

It's because of the alcohol. Even though I was so careful.

Or rather, that's rude. What do you mean by fatass? Although I was certainly obese...

"Uwah, I see, so it's that person, Rudeus is that person...! Eeeh, you became this cool, Heeeeh...!"

Nanahoshi put her hand to her mouth and opened her eyes wide.

Not good, she's become excited.

I thought she'd be disgusted, but she somehow seems happy.

"Um, Nanahoshi=san^[80]... If possible, that is, I'd be thankful if you could keep it a secret from everybody."

"Why?"

"... If they find out, they may abandon me."

"I don't think they chose you because of your face, though..."

"Even so, there are things I'd like to keep a secret."

"... I guess so."

Nanahoshi dropped herself back onto the sofa.

So she understands. I thought she'd be obstinate and not cooperate with me, though.

"Since Rudeus is different from me; you're [reincarnated]."

"Yeah."

That's right, reincarnation.

I can't go back to how I was.

It's not like I intend to completely abandon everything from back then, but I don't intend to proactively go looking, either.^[81]

In addition, I think my past life is something to be ashamed of.

I do think that I am the way I am now only because of how hopeless I was back then, but shameful things are still shameful.

"I understand. I'll keep it to myself."

"... Please."

Then, I thought back to my previous life.

"Oh, that's right, I was forgetting something."

"What?"

"Since you already know my identity... well, not really, but I want you to deliver this to my home from my previous life."

Saying that, I laid an envelope out on the table.

In this slightly thick envelope, my feelings for my siblings from my previous life are enclosed.

It's been twenty-odd years since I came here.

A lot of things happened in that time.

Because of those things, I think I can proudly say I'm different from how I was back then. I'll only say that I'm different, though; I absolutely won't say I've become admirable or anything...

Anyhow, an apology for that time, reminiscences, and my current circumstances are all crammed into there.

If, by chance, Nanahoshi is sent to Japan and not a single day has passed, they may wonder what the hell I'm saying...

But, that's fine.

It's like self-satisfaction.

"I understand."

As if it were important, Nanahoshi put it into her bag.

"I'll make sure it gets delivered."

"I'm counting on you."

The destination isn't necessarily Japan.

There's no guarantee that she can make it back to Japan after she teleports.

But even so, she nodded.

"Also, take this."

I handed over one more letter.

Compared to the last one, it's very thin.

"If several years have passed over there, and you have nobody to rely on, no home, and nowhere to go... This letter asks my siblings to, even if just for a little while, take care of you."

"...!"

The hands that Nanahoshi received the letter with were trembling.

"That's..."

"Well, I was a parasite over there, so they may not listen, but... Just in case."

"You were a parasite?"

"Yeah, I was a jobless good-for-nothing."

When she gets there and meets my siblings, it'll get known anyway.

"That's a little hard to believe..."

Nanahoshi said that and looked long and hard at my face.

I wonder if her saying that is proof that I've done my best.

If so, it makes me happy.

"However, if it comes to that, I'll use this thankfully."

As if it were important, Nanahoshi clutched it to her chest and bowed her head.

"Truly, for all you've done for me, thank you very much."

Nanahoshi returns tomorrow.

The experiments were perfect.

That magic circle is impeccable.

However, even so there is a tinge of anxiety in my heart.

The magic circle made with careful preparations and numerous experiments.

Nanahoshi is confident, and nobody thinks that it will fail.

However, there is a point to be concerned about.

There's only one remaining.

At the present, I don't intend to say that and make her anxious.

In the first place, Nanahoshi should already be aware of that.

However, she doesn't say it.

It may be she's already made arrangements for that.

"... Tomorrow, we're getting you home."

Therefore, that is all I said.

"Yes."

Nanahoshi nodded.

I get the feeling that some things can be accomplished as long as you have a strong will.

Chapter 9

Nanahoshi's Fate

Part 1

The day of Nanahoshi's return has finally come.
Only Perugius, his servants, and I were present at the teleportation magic circle.
Nanahoshi didn't want anyone else to see her off.
She's already gone around and said her farewells to everyone.

Our formation is the same as before.
I'm the mana supply, Perugius is the controller.
Nanahoshi is standing in the center of the magic circle.

She's standing there facing me, wearing a traveling outfit and carrying a large backpack.
The backpack was packed to deal with any conceivable situation.
Even though I say that, neither Nanahoshi or I have any experience traveling overseas in our previous world.
She should need identification and something to exchange for cash; also, we don't know if things like magic crystals or scrolls will be usable over there.
So we packed roughly what we thought was needed for a journey.
After that, it's up to her wisdom and courage to get her through.

“...”

Nanahoshi looked at me, I looked at her.
There's no need to say anything more.
We spoke enough yesterday.
Anything else is unnecessary.

“Rudeus! Preparations are complete!”

At Perugius’ signal, I placed my hands on the teleportation apparatus.

Everything’s proceeding as usual.

We’ve practiced this experiment many times already.

Although not all of the attempts were successful, any points of failure were identified and fixed.

At this point, Perugius and I are veterans.

Well, even if I call myself a veteran, all I really do is supply the mana.

“Everything’s set.”

“Nanahoshi, that’s good!”

Nanahoshi faced Perugius and nodded.

“Yes, Perugius-sama, thank you for everything!”

“Formalities are unnecessary. Thanks to you, I have also learned many interesting things.”

That’s all there was to Perugius and Nanahoshi’s farewell.

After that, they immediately went back to focusing on what they were doing.

Nanahoshi faced me, and Perugius signaled to one of his servants.

“Then, let’s begin.”

At Perugius’ signal, the teleportation device started.

Everything is proceeding as usual.

Perugius and his servants placed their hands on the magic circle.

As I begin supplying magic power, the edges of the magic circle begin to faintly give off light.

My mana is being drained at a tremendous rate, but I’m already accustomed to that.

Then, reacting to my mana, the magic circle began to shine brightly.

First blue, then green, then white.

While the magic circle was giving off tremendous amounts of light, I was focused on properly supplying the mana.

Thanks to repeating the experiment so many times, I'm accustomed to the timing I need to allocate my mana.

Evenly, without waste, not too much, but not too little.

The magic circle, as usual, started emitting a black light...

Huh?

I don't think there's been a black coloring before.

Somehow, I have a bad feeling about this.

"Rudeus!"

Perugius shouted.

The black light's growing stronger.

I don't know whether I should continue or stop.

I'm not the one controlling the process; I don't know what to do.

"Perugius-sama! Instructions!"

"We need more power—!"

As instructed, I increased the amount of power pouring into the magic circle.

My legs are getting weak; even my vision is going hazy from using this much power.

Yet the black magic circle shows no sign of change.

But, I have a feeling like something's overflowing in my arm.

This is the first time I've felt this.

This might be dangerous.

Very dangerous; should I cut the power?

But, Perugius said we needed more magic power, I need to have faith—

—*crack*...!

Something burst.

Then, as if a breaker tripped, the magic circle lost its light.

All in a split second.

The light normally disappears slowly, but this time it happened in an instant.

Almost as if all the magic was suddenly absorbed by something.

“...”

We’re still here.

The candlesticks in the corner of the room are still giving off light.

But the room is shrouded in silence, like a PC shutting down.

And, of course.

Needless to say.

Nanahoshi was still here.

Still standing in the center of the magic circle.

Everyone is dumbstruck.

I am too, the servants look as if they don’t understand; a feeling of confusion has filled the room.

“... What happened!”

Perugius shouted.

“What did you do, Rudeus Greyrat!”

“Huh?”

Me?

“Why was the supply of magic cut halfway!”

Cut?

I didn’t though.

“I was properly supplying mana.”

“Then, why did that...”

The supply of magic was cut?

But I didn't reduce the amount of mana. Rather, I increased it.

Somehow it felt different.

No mana was being released from my hands?

But, I still feel the fatigue from using up an enormous amount of mana.

“If the mana supply was cut, the magic circle should have lost its light.”

“That's right... there was definitely mana... but, the flow was interrupted... as if someone compromised the magic circle...”

Looking at the magic circle, it seems like part of it cracked.

Was there a bug somewhere and the device short-circuited?

No, give me a break.

It's not something that would suddenly break.

“Ugh...”

Perugius had his hand on his chin in a thoughtful expression.

Nanahoshi descended from the magic circle.

“...”

Nanahoshi was silent.

She lowered her backpack in silence, almost as if she was sleepwalking, and left the room.

Looking at Perugius...

He's still thinking.

Somehow, his servants also seem shaken up.

What to do...

I want to figure out the cause of failure, but...

No, I'll leave that to Perugius.

I went after Nanahoshi.

Part 2

Nanahoshi was sitting on the bed in her room.

Her shoulders and head were drooping.

With her head down, I can't see her expression.

Judging from her posture, it seems like a mix between fatigue and resignation.

And, like me, at least a little shock from the failure.

“ ... ”

It's time for an honest conversation.

I had a sneaking suspicion this would be a failure.

That's because of what my future self said.

He said [It fails at the very end.]

Although I don't know if this is the end, or there's more to come.

I never heard the specifics of the failure.

It's not something I would have understood.

I don't even know whether the experiment turned out differently.

Thinking back now, I should have asked for more details, but regrets won't help.

Moreover, my future self said I failed to support her.

I failed to support her, and then Nanahoshi...

Although my future self was vague, I have no doubt she met a sorrowful end.

In other words, that's now.

Here and now, Nanahoshi is depressed, I need to support her.

But, I don't know how to respond.

Failure can happen to anyone, it's no use worrying about, that's... normal.

Even my future self should have said something like that.

No, because my future self became such a hardened person, he might not have said anything at all.

In fact, he might have said something horrible and driven Nanahoshi away. He was a considerably horrible person; he might have even said something like, [It's probably impossible to return anyway, just become my woman.] and attacked her.

... I'd like to know the failed example.

Well, I'll have to think for myself.

If my correct answer is a mistake, I'd really like to know what went wrong when I try to console Nanahoshi.

Umm...

I guess I'll start as always.

When Sylphy is like this, I'd sit down next to her. Then put my hand on her shoulder.

"Is this how you seduced those three?"

Nanahoshi raised her face and looked at me with damp eyes.

... yeah, that is kind of like making a move.

"Excuse me."

I returned the hand I was about to place on Nanahoshi's shoulder to my knee.

"Um, Nanahoshi-san. Can we talk?"

"Huh? I'm busy."

"Well, even so... being alone at a time like this, it might be better to talk things out, even if it isn't easy. Even if it doesn't solve the problem, we can work on that afterwards; getting your spirit back is more important."

The book Nanahoshi had open on her knee caught my eye.

Japanese was written on the page.

[The hypothesis failed at the final stage.]

That's what was written.

"It was good to hear that I would fail beforehand."

Nanahoshi traced her notes with her finger as she said that.

“If I failed without knowing that, I would have blamed some defect in the magic circle.”

Nanahoshi looked up.

She doesn't look depressed.

I seem to have misunderstood the fatigue and resignation I saw earlier.

After all, Nanahoshi considered the possibility of failure.

Well, maybe she doesn't need my support then.

No, it's possible she's still depressed...

As I was thinking, Nanahoshi turned back to her notebook.

“Hey, do you remember my hypothesis?”

Hypothesis, hypothesis...

I have a feeling that I heard something about that.

Somehow, I felt like it was nonsensical.

I don't remember it very well.

“I'm sorry. I don't remember.”

“... ”

Nanahoshi's eyes were getting moist again.

I'm sorry.

“Well, then I'll give you the outline...”

Nanahoshi began her explanation.

That is to say, she just began reading out of her notebook.

“First of all, the Fedoa Region metastasis event (that summoned me) is not originally supposed to happen.”

“Why would something that doesn’t originally happen occur? When I heard about your future self, I thought someone from the future sent me to the past... no, more like [Placed in the past.]”

“Because a person who should not originally exist was placed in the past, history changed. The balance of the world’s aggregate magic power was broken, causing an adjustment on the scale of the Fedoa Region disappearing to occur.”

Ah, I remember hearing about this.

But at the time I had other things on my mind, so I don’t remember much.

It’s a nonsensical conversation, but...

She’s become more energetic, she seems to be recovering from the shock.

No, it’s too soon to say that.

She might just be distracted.

I should still keep her company.

“Do you understand?”

“Yeah.”

Nanahoshi turned to another page in her notes.

This page was labeled [Who and Why].

“From here on is the main issue.

Someone in the future modified history and I was the outcome.

Allow me to explain why it’s because of [The Future].

I was able to come to this conclusion because of Orsted.

He is sent from the [Past] and does a loop in the [Present].

In the present, Orsted can’t really intervene, and his loop is the strongest existence until he wins.” [82]

Orsted’s father, the first Dragon God sent him.

The first generation Dragon God used a secret technique to send Orsted into a fixed-interval time loop.

According to Orsted, he can only escape the loop by defeating Hitogami.

Until now, he hasn't been able to, but sooner or later he should succeed.
He's definitely strong enough.

"I think the fact that we were sent here is related to the fight between the Dragon God and Human God." [83]

"Why is that?"

"Immediately after I was transferred, the first person I met was Orsted. Afterwards I met you, and greatly changed Orsted's fate. We intervened in Orsted's loop."

Orsted loops in order to defeat Hitogami.

I don't know what will happen after he wins.

But, to defeat him, the past might have to somehow be altered.

Nanahoshi and I might have been placed here as some sort of strategic move...

But who would do that?

It's Orsted.

He loops when he loses.

In other words, it's possible that future Orsted brought us here.

"But, it can't be Orsted. He's not capable of that."

Yeah.

Because, even without modifying the past, Orsted would eventually win.

Even if Orsted could alter the past, rather than interfering with his loop, it would make more sense to change events before that.

Like preventing Laplace from being divided during the second Human-Demon Great War. Alternatively, there's the possibility that future Orsted has already intervened in his past loops...

I have no idea.

"It's not possible for Hitogami either. Hitogami was supposed to win in this loop... even Orsted said as much."

Orsted wasn't aware of Gisu's existence.

Therefore, he was supposed to win a little later.

Like tripping over a small stone, it's completely unexpected.

In this loop, without us, Hitogami would definitely win. That's why there would be no reason for Hitogami to change the past.

"Then, who, for what reason?"

"That is the main subject. Though this is only a hypothesis..."

Nanahoshi lightly tapped a name written in her notebook.

Written there, the name [Shinohara Akihito].

And, directly beneath it was written [Kuroki Seiji], with an X through it and [Rudeus Greyrat] written to its side.

"Yesterday, you told me who you were, remember? At that time, Aki and I... Shinohara Akihito was hugging me, and you had pushed Kuroki Seiji to safety. In other words, it's unlikely he was teleported."

"Three people were run over by the truck that day. Of them, two have been transported to this place. But, the remaining person, has not."

"And, you were transferred here a decade earlier than I was..."

In other words, it's likely three people were teleported that day, to different times."

Although I've been reincarnated...

Well, it's not that different.

"It's too coincidental that you were transferred, and then I was.

So, it would make sense if Shinohara Akihito was transferred to the future.

And, Shinohara Akihito met Orsted.

This is the first time this has happened in Orsted's loops.

Future Orsted befriended Shinohara Akihito and, realizing he couldn't beat Hitogami... moved to secure victory."

So someone from the future modified the past...

"... Then, that led to the Fedoa Region's disappearance? That guy, Shinohara Akihito, came up with a method to modify the past?"

“It’s not something he could do himself. However, just like we’ve met many people here, he must have met various people as well.

That’s how, he must have found someone with the power to alter the past...”

A miko.

That word suddenly flashed across my mind.

Zanoba has superhuman strength,

The miko in Milis can read memories just by looking into her target’s eyes.

It wouldn’t be strange if there’s a miko with the power to alter the past.

“Has Orsted mentioned someone like that?”

“He did. [A miko who can rewind an object’s time.]”

Rewinding an object’s time... huh?

That’s a little different from what I thought.

Although it’s not what I expected, the miko’s power is undoubtedly related to time.

“However, the miko has an incredibly weak fate, and dies quickly as a result...”

“And Shinohara Akihito saved the miko.”

Everything is clicking into place.

Shinohara Akihito met the miko.

In addition he met Orsted, and probably created a magic tool to amplify the miko’s ability.

Nanahoshi and Perugius created this powerful teleportation device.

Cliff and Zanoba created the magic armor.

It’s the same thing.

Then, using that ability, he altered the past...

“... But, how is the teleportation’s failure connected to this?”

“That’s just it.”

Nanahoshi turned to another page.

There, written across the top, [My future in case I can’t return home.]

“I considered that. I was looking for Shinohara Akihito, and he was looking for me.”

“... Ah.”

“Well, it’s only a hypothesis...

I am unable to return now because I am supposed to return with Shinohara Akihito in the future.

Or perhaps I can’t return until some event comes to pass.

Or maybe both.”

In other words, that’s it.

I’ll put it in order.

In the future.

For some reason, a man named Shinohara Akihito was summoned.

Shinohara collaborated with Orsted.

However, it was impossible to win against Hitogami in that state.

Upon investigating, he found the cause was in the past.

Therefore, by amplifying the miko’s power, he modified the past.

.... Perhaps that’s why I was summoned here.

That’s why Hitogami saw that he would be killed by my descendants in the future.

So, the unknown person who was there with Orsted and my descendants was Shinohara Akihito.

However, there’s a problem.

He had no way to return to his original world.

So Shinohara Akihito borrowed the miko’s power again.

This time summoning Nanahoshi, who’s dying to return home.

And because of that, she made the teleportation magic circle.

However, that might have been overdoing it.

So, the entire Fedoa Region ended up disappearing...

Thinking about it, I’m starting to get annoyed at this Shinohara Akihito guy.

If this hypothesis is correct, the entire Fedoa Region was annihilated because Shinohara Akihito was selfish.

Although it's only a hypothesis.

No...

I can't really blame him.

It's possible that Shinohara Akihito was out of other options; his only choice might have been modifying the past.

Doing something like that is dangerous; he may have chosen to modify the past in order to protect something important, even if it could cost him his life.

When I came to this world, my number of important things increased.

My wives, my children, my sisters.

In order to protect them, I became Orsted's subordinate.

Orsted turned out to be a surprisingly good guy, but I didn't know that at the time.

I was sure I would be ordered to do inhumane things.

And I'm sure I would have obeyed those orders, in order to protect my family.

We might be the same in that regard.

The only difference is what we consider important.

"I see... then, Nanahoshi. If you assume your hypothesis is correct, what are you going to do?"

"Well... until I play my part, it won't be possible for me to return home. I already finished the teleportation device. So there's nothing left for me to do."

Her role...

If Nanahoshi's role is completing the teleportation device, then I wonder what my role is.

Leading Orsted to victory?

Or maybe my purpose is to kill Gisu, when all of our enemies are gathered at one point... thinking about it, dealing with Gisu is my primary concern.

Hitogami may have others besides Gisu hiding.

"But, I'm unable to return. So there must be something else I have to do."

"Alright."

"If I think about it, my purpose here must be to send Shinohara Akihito back to our original world in the future."

“Yeah?”

“That’s just it, isn’t it? I made the device. But if he doesn’t know how to use it, he can’t return.”

Well...

Yeah, even if there’s a mana battery like me, it would be difficult to operate the device.

It seems unlikely that Perugia would still be alive.

But, this way of thinking, isn’t it too much?

It should be fine to make a manual or something.

“Or perhaps [I’m already in the future.]”

Ah, that could be problematic.

If a time paradox occurs, it might not be possible to return.

If Nanahoshi returns now, future Nanahoshi won’t exist.

If it’s the future that’s changing the past, then the future is the priority, so the magic device’s operation might become ambiguous.

“But it might be impossible for me to survive another 80 years. Disease is always a risk.”

As Nanahoshi said that, she looked towards a teacup in the corner of the room.

It’s easy to forget, but Nanahoshi is already suffering from a chronic illness.

A parallel-world AIDS.

Presently, the symptoms are suppressed by routinely drinking tea made from Sokasu grass.

However, she doesn’t know when she’ll contract another disease.

Projecting 80 years into the future, her survival rate lowers.

“So what will you do?”

“Therefore...”

Nanahoshi began to answer.

Her solution.

“I’ll request Perugia to stop my time.”

One of Perugius's servants, Sukeakoto of Time.

It's possible to stop time for whomever he touches.

With that power, Nanahoshi can definitely survive.

For a long time, though it's unlikely to last the entire time.

Perugius won't be able to leave Sukeakoto idle when Laplace revives.

Laplace will revive in 80 years, 50 at the soonest.

And, if Orsted cannot reach Hitogami without defeating Laplace, then Mr. Shinohara will help him...

Nanahoshi will wake up at the perfect time.

"So, Rudeus. I have a request for you."

"... a request?"

I wonder what it is.

"You have to make sure Shinohara Akihito does not overlook my existence.

I'll leave this book to you, to help you set up more teleportation sites. ^[84]

After that, even though it's taboo, I want you to announce the existence of teleportation magic circles to the world and help advance its research."

"... Will that be necessary?"

"What if my hypothesis is incorrect? I mean, it would be strange if everything fit together just like that. 80% of it could be considered a delusion; there's no insurance. If my hypothesis is wrong, then 80 years later, I'll be able to return properly."

That hypothesis seems pretty reliable.

Even if it's slightly off, I feel like it's pretty much correct.

But that's just it.

It's not necessarily correct.

Even if Shinohara was transferred too, it's not limited to just that.

The reason Nanahoshi can't return might actually be due to a defect in the magic circle.

Although we think it's perfect now, there might be some obscure problem that can't be resolved without a breakthrough.

“Of course, I plan to check on the situation several times a year; things might turn out differently...”

The situation can change.

Her hypothesis isn't necessarily correct either.

And, I want to help Nanahoshi return home to the best of my abilities.

I, also have a reason.

I went through great pains to write the letter I entrusted to her.

“I understand.”

I nodded.

Part 3

Afterwards, we tried again.

Once again, after reviewing the magic device, we tried to send Nanahoshi home.

There was no problem with the magic circle.

Even after carefully examining it, there was no particular damage.

But, it was still impossible.

As if it was being obstructed by someone, the mana supply was insufficient.

Because I know it's not a problem on my end, unless Perugius is lying, it might really be interference from the future.

... Or it could be Hitogami's interference.

Thus, Nanahoshi's return ended in failure.

No, I shouldn't really say it's ended.

After the failure, Perugius announced Nanahoshi was put in chronostasis.

I thought Perugius might object, but he readily accepted.

After being asked to lend Sukeakoto of Time to put Nanahoshi to sleep, after seeing her inconsolable expression for a moment, he just muttered [Is that so] and consented.

They might have discussed it beforehand.

Regarding what would happen if it fails.

“Then, Rudeus. Perugius-sama, for everything that happens from here on out, thank you in advance.”

That was the last thing Nanahoshi said before disappearing into her room.

From this point on, she'll only wake up when Sukeakoto of Time's magic is interrupted.

About once a month.

When I think about the fact that I've basically been estranged from Nanahoshi for the past few years, I don't really feel lonely.

It's almost like she's going somewhere far away.

I don't exactly feel lonely, but some other emotions are swirling about in my chest.

I wonder what this feeling is.

In any case, I don't feel very refreshed.

“Rudeus Greyrat.”

While trying to sort out those feelings, I was about to leave the Sky Fortress, when Perugius called out to me.

“I hate the word ‘fate’.”

“... I'm not fond of it myself.”

That's a bit abrupt.

I don't know why we're having such a talk now, but I agree.

I don't like the idea of dancing on someone's palms.

“The idea of the future determining the past is ridiculous. I won't accept something like that.”

Perugius truly seemed to hate the idea, and looked towards the room Nanahoshi disappeared into.

“The very idea of it ridicules the past, and belittles the present. I won't accept it.”

“Even though you say that so plainly, you readily lent your servant to Nanahoshi.”

“Pfft.”

Perugius let out a snort.

Then fixed his eyes on me with a severe look.

“I believe the magic circle was defective.”

“...”

“Nanahoshi seems to have already given up, but I will not. While she is asleep, I will complete the magic circle. I swear it on my title of Dragon King.”

Perugius seems motivated.

Although his eyes look a little dark, they seem to have a fire lit in them.

“But unfortunately, I cannot match your aggregate magic power. Rudeus Greyrat. Lend me your power.”

“... I don’t mind. However, Perugia-sama, why would you go that far for Nanahoshi?”

As I said that, Perugia’s expression suddenly calmed.

I guess he doesn’t know why himself, and he’s just looking towards the future.

And, as if he suddenly had an idea, he raised his eyebrow.

“For the past, this is the future. It was the past just now. And now it’s the future. I believe my pupil has made a foolish mistake, and want to correct it. Until Laplace’s revival, this is just killing time.”

A foolish mistake?

I guess, to Perugia, Nanahoshi’s behavior might be like a child sulking in bed.

Even if it’s useless right now, in the future something might change.

It’s wishful thinking.

“... I understand. I’ll cooperate.”

“You have my thanks.”

“Don’t mind it.”

It was a comfortable exchange, and I couldn’t help but let out a little laugh.

Maybe, Nanahoshi might not return in my lifetime.

But if, for some reason, she isn’t able to return, there are people who care for her.

Knowing that somehow makes me happy.

Part 4

Just like that, Nanahoshi went to sleep.

Until the future.

I feel refreshed, my gloominess from before has lifted.

A strange feeling remained.

Perhaps, even without me, Nanahoshi can return in the future.

Since my future self had a sad expression, without hearing her hypothesis, he must have assumed she committed suicide after hearing from Perugius.

Well, whatever the case, that's one thing done.

Perugius is going to continue with the research, though Nanahoshi might also do something in the future...

Well what's done is done.

It's time to switch tracks.

Nanahoshi is capable of thinking for herself, and choosing her own path.

I also have things I have to do.

Alright.

The next place on the list is Sword God Gull Farion.

Let's go with Eris and two other people.

Simple is best.

Though I'm a little uneasy going without backup, I've heard that the Holy Land of Swords doesn't have many bright guys.

It's full of guys that have discussions with their fists.

But, before that, I need to report to Orsted.

Regarding Nanahoshi's decision.

Although he might have already heard her hypothesis...

Nevertheless, I have to report the outcome.

While thinking so, I headed towards Orsted's office on foot.

“Ah, Chairman Rudeus! Thank you for your hard work!”

When I entered the lobby, the receptionist girl bowed.

This child is energetic.

“The president is waiting for you in the back.”

“Gotcha.”

While replying, I entered the president’s office.

After entering, I closed the door, took a stance with my feet shoulder width apart, and put my hands behind my back.

As always, I bowed to Orsted, who was sitting at his desk.

“There is a report.”

“... Let’s hear it.”

“Nanahoshi’s return failed. She believes the cause is in the future; Perugius lent her Sukeakoto of Time to sleep until then.”

“I see.”

Orsted slowly removed his helmet.

Then placed his hand on his temple and let out a long sigh.

“What did Perugius say?”

“That he believes the failure was caused by a defect in the magic circle, and that he will improve the magic circle in order to return Nanahoshi...”

“Is that it?”

“And that the past cannot be determined by the future.”

“That’s right. That sounds like something Perugius would say.”

Orsted’s voice somehow sounded more muffled in emotion than usual.

No, as usual, his voice is level and he has a sour look.

“You’ve heard about Nanahoshi’s matter. What are you going to do?”

“For the time being, I’ll gradually consider Nanahoshi’s matter.
I think I should head to the Sword God, Gull Farion.
As usual, I would like to request the details.”
“I see... I’ve already compiled information regarding Gull Farion.”

Orsted retrieved a stack of papers from a cabinet.
Preparations are good this time.
I’d be fine just talking, but this is good too.
Shouldn’t compiling these kinds of documents be my role?
No, it’s too late for that.

“I shall gratefully accept this.”
“Everything is written in this document. Avoid fighting Gull Farion.”
“Yes.”
“After that... hmm?”

Suddenly, Orsted shifted his line of sight.
I’m tempted to look as well.
There, stones are lined up in a row.
Although they look like tombstones, they’re the communication lithographs I’ve installed in various locations.
At the bottom of each lithograph, the name of the installation location is written.
Asura Kingdom, Millis, Ouryuu Kingdom (doing well), the magic continent, the number has increased quite a bit.
This is less like a president’s office and more like a server room.

Orsted’s gaze was directed to a certain point.
One of the lithographs emitted a pale light.
That lithograph corresponded to the one in Atofe’s fortress.
The letter was brief.

[Kishirika Kishirisu has been captured.]

Chapter 10

A Second^[85]

Part 1

Fort Necros, located in the Gaslow region of the Demon Continent. ^[86]

Deep within the most impregnable fortress in the Demon Continent, within a dungeon seldom used was a prisoner.

"Grrrrrrrrr..."

This prisoner had shackles around their hands, balls and chains around their legs, and was wearing pajamas with blue and white stripes. It was a miserable sight.

"Grrrrrrrrrr..."

The growl resounding throughout the prison was originating from the depths of the prisoner's stomach.

One might say this sound of displeasure was proof the prisoner did not think of their present situation as comfortable.

Alternatively, the prisoner was just hungry.

"Out!"

Suddenly, the prison door was opened along with two daunting men clad completely in pitch-black armor entering.

They made the prisoner stand and took them outside the prison, the ball and chains making scraping sounds as they were dragged along.

Yet the prisoner showed no sign of heeding the balls and chains, apparently having a surprising amount of strength.

Being lead by the black knights, the criminal exited the prison.

Past a long corridor and up a passage of stairs, the prisoner had arrived at an audience hall.

"Hurry up!"

The prisoner had their back shoved as if receiving a verdict and staggered their way into a circular plaza surrounded by violet candlestands.

Raising their head, the prisoner saw a throne—the throne that the prisoner once sat upon that a Demon King now did.

"Atofe..."

The female Demon King was clad in pitch-black armor.

The moment the prisoner saw her, the prisoner's face dyed with anger.

"...What meaning is this?!"

The prisoner shouted from the bottom of her stomach.

Maybe due to there being nothing in her stomach, her voice left a strong echo.

"Hmph, I follow he is who stronger than me! Just like with Laplace and after, that's all!"

In response, the most feared Demon King on the Demon Continent glared at the criminal, almost becoming irritated.

"How wretched, Necros would roll over in his grave!"

"Father said that I should live however I want to!"

"That is simply because you listen not to what anyone speaks! He merely gave up because you can only live selfishly anyway!"

"I'm not an idiot!"

The Demon King roared.

But the criminal didn't care for her anger, only sneering with an aloof face.

"You are. You've always been a giant idiot and you even know that. You know that you bite at the bait right in front of your eyes without a thought in the world."

"I do not! Kalmann said I was clever! He said I had good memory!"

"Oh, but Atofe..."

The criminal made a declaration, a declaration to the Demon King using words that shouldn't have been said.

"It's naught but flattery."

The Demon King snapped.

She was hair-raisingly angry. The surrounding black knights clung onto her, but were promptly flung about.

But the black knights wouldn't succumb, grouping up and stopping the Demon King in her tracks.

The Demon King flailed her arm about while declaring the death sentence for the prisoner.

"You bitch! Die! I'll kill you! Die again!"

"Heh, heh! Try learning arithmetic or such if it is so irritable."

"Ugaaaahhh!"

The criminal further provoked the Demon King, who mustered all her strength and forced back the black knights.

"Lord Kishirika, please cease this! Please do not provoke Lord Atofe any further!"

"Shut up! This One followed you lot because you told This One you would feed This One something good and all This One gets is poor treatment! This One shan't feel better until This One has said at least that much!"

Yes, the criminal had fallen for a trap, deceived.

She had been lured by the words, "Miss, we'll give you something yummy, so come with us for a moment," by men who had stripped off their trademark black armor, and had fallen into a trap.

Yes, there was bait dangling right in front of her eyes, she followed along without a thought in the world, and she fell into a pitfall!

The promise had been broken; the criminal was given nothing delicious of the sort.

"In the first place, This One has yet to hear the reason why this one has been taken captive! What has This One done?! This One has done no...no...misdeed of the sort?"

Then, the criminal's hands began to fidget and rub together.

She had far too many misdeeds that came to mind.

Thinking about them, the criminal had the delusion that she had done nothing but bad things, her hands stained in wrongdoings.

It was natural for someone to be angry at her.

But the Demon King declared.

"Hmph! You haven't done anything bad!"

Her anger had settled in just a few seconds. Leaving aside if it were someone else, the Demon King knew there was little meaning in getting angry at this particular criminal.

"Then for what purpose?! Even you are not so spiteful a person to imprison This One over nothing! The times when you do this are the times when you're mistaken or when you've been deceived by someone..."

Then, the criminal had realized something.

"That must be it! You've been tricked by someone again!"

"You're wrong! I'm not being tricked!"

"All those deceived speak such! Very well! Tell This One everything about it! There's still time left before it is unrecoverable and This One shall help. So won't you take these manacles off...?"

The criminal presented her manacles in front of her.

The Demon King, in response, faced the fading day after tomorrow. [87]

"Deception is done through conversation, but that isn't what we did. We fought—we fought each other. After the battle, I admitted defeat."

"You lie! As if someone who hates losing as much as you would admit defeat openly!"

"The man I lost to and recognize...is him!"

The Demon King pointed.

There...was a magician wearing a grey robe with an evil expression.

It was a lecherous face that looked like he had 3 women serving upon him.

Alternatively, it was also likely the man was just smiling with all his might.

"Y-You are...Rubens!"

"Close, but not quite."

"C-Certainly with the amount of mana you possess, even Atofe might..."

The criminal was overcome with terror.

She had met this magician just two times in the past.

The first time they had met, she had laughed at his disgusting amount of mana, and the second time, she had laughed at the magic power that could repel a Demon King.

There was no laughing the third time.

She couldn't laugh at the man who made Atofe submit and at the man who captured her.

"Heh heh..."

The magician laughed while quietly overlooking her.

"Truth is, there's something I want to give you, you see..."

"W-W-W-What is it, a requiem?"

"Heh heh heh, it's something much better."

The magician was brimming with joy and made a bright smile.

"Th-Th-This One will be tricked not! Humans always do such! They try to trick This One by using sweet words!"

The criminal offered resistance, but there was no escape.

Her voice was trembling and she was holding down her groin that was on verge of losing control while seeking refuge in a fluster.

"Let's see if you can still say that after seeing this."

The magician lowered the bag that was on his back and reached a hand inside.

What came out was a black box.

"Eek...!"

A small shriek leaked from the prisoner's throat.

A deep black box!

Just imagining what could be in such a black box thoroughly stoked the criminal's fears.

What in the world could be in it?

No matter what it is, it's a deep black box.

There was no doubt something inconceivably horrific was inside!

Because it's black!

"Once you take this, you'll want to do anything I say."

"Wh-What...!?"

He opened the box.

In there were rings the size of a fist, tightly packed inside.

The rings were yellow with a white something sticking to them like mold.

This eerie sight, dangerous color, and sweet aroma drifting from them caused the criminal's hair to stand on end.

"Wh-What are those...? What do you intend to do with them...?!"

"Heh heh, these, you see, are for this."

The magician picked one out by the hand and drew it near Kishirika's mouth.
Simultaneously, two black knights seized the criminal so that she couldn't move a muscle.

"Say 'ahh'."

"S-St... St... Stop iiiit!!!"

--- Rudeus' POV ---

Kishirika Kishirisu, the Great Empress of the Demon Realm, was crying while eating the donuts I brought.

"So such a wonderful thing existed in the world, these wonders...!"

They were donuts made with eggs and sugar procured from the Holy Country of Milis.

The producer: Aisha Greyrat.

A while back, she had heard from Nanahoshi that there was a food like this and had taught herself how to make them.

Our meals at home are made using plenty of oil, so gathering the ingredients was simple.

"This One knows not what to say...! Mayhaps This One was born to happen upon this flavor...!"

Kishirika had looked like she was in a bad mood when she arrived in the audience hall, but it looked long cured by now.

Must be the magic of donuts.

When were having the donuts sampled, Roxy had tried some too and the result was exceptional.

I'm not sure I've ever seen Roxy look so happy before.

I, at least, can't make her produce such a happy-looking expression.

No, I was the one who made the route to Milis to replenish stocks. Therefore, it could be said I was the cause of that happy expression.

Father-in-law, Mother-in-law, I'm making Roxy very happy. With donuts that Aisha made.

Regardless, donuts have the magic power to render demons powerless.

"Oh..."

But that magic power was limited since the magic worked on a number of casts system. Kishirika had finished eating 12 donuts and was making a sorrowful expression.

"Is there no more...?"

"There isn't."

"...If you were to give This One a second helping, This One would grant anything you desire."

"Those are the words I wanted to hear."

I spoke with a smile, and Kishirika made an expression of realization and tightly embraced her own body.

"Kh... So you're after This One's body... No matter how many delicious things you feed This One, This One's body is Badi's... But being allowed to eat such deliciousness... Kh!"

"I'm abstinent for the time being, so I'll pass."

"I see... Enduring it does not do wonders for one's body, you know?"

"Even if I were unable to endure it, I would ask my wives."

"Wives? Ohh, is that so. You were already married. Goodness gracious, humans grow so quick..."

Now then, for the issue at hand.

I came here today just to ask this.

Since Kishirika will reward whoever gives her food, I went out of the way to have donuts made.

"To start, I wish for you to find a man named Gisu using your power."

"Hoh, Gisu..."

"Yes, his characteristics are—"

I told Kishirika Gisu's detailed characteristics and what was thought to be his real name that was written in the letter.

"Hrmm, I feel like I've heard about this fellow somewhere... One moment."

Kishirika, her mouth still dirty, began moving her eyes around.

Her eyes were transforming like a clattering slot machine and suddenly stopped at a certain moment.

They were one of Kishirika's magic eyes, Clairvoyance.

She examined the air with them and began viewing somewhere else with a frown.

"Hoh... Hm... That... Oh, looks good..."

Kishirika mumbled, her gaze roaming.

And once again, at a certain timing, Kishirika came to a sudden halt.

"Found him."

It was in no time at all.

"The Kingdom of Bihaeril, the eastern tip of the northern lands. He is speaking with someone in a forest... Good gracious, such a villainous face..."

Kishirika bent even more forward while letting out an 'Ihihi' laughter.

"Now then, he is speaking to... Hm?"

Instantly, Kishirika's expression dimmed.

"I can't see anymore."

Kishirika made a serious expression, a complete change from a moment ago and she closed her eyes.

She faced toward the sky while keeping her eyes closed, as if resting them.

But after a short while, she slowly opened them.

"This feeling... That must be it. The one you are fighting against currently is Hitogami...isn't it?"

In a complete contrast to her usual self, she was giving off a quiet impression almost like a different person.

"That's right."

"To fight Hitogami means, in other words, you are follower to the Dragon God, are you not?"

"...Right."

"Hrrmmm..."

Kishirika folded her arms and tightened her jaw.

It was a forced thinking pose.

Several seconds later, she again looked up at the sky as if gazing at the moon.

Although currently it was noon, the weather was good; only clouds were passing by.

"And Atofe, you are following this man?"

"Yeah."

"Then...mayhaps this is divine will."

There wasn't a trace left of her usual playful atmosphere, almost like a sage.

I wonder how that happened.

Did the donuts go down the wrong pipe...?

"Lord Kishirika, you know of Hitogami?"

"Indeed. This One has history with him... Honestly, This One thought the connection was already gone."

"History you say?"

"Tis nothing much. A mere 4,200 years ago, This One was used—both This One and Badi, by Hitogami who wanted to kill Laplace."

4,200 years ago...?

Ah, around the Second Human-Demon War.

"If I recall, the Fighting God and Dragon God had fought."

"Indeed. Badi, clad in the Fighting God armor in order to protect me, fought with Laplace, the Demon Dragon King."

"Huh... His Majesty Badigadi had?"

I suppose the truth just revealed could be called shocking.

So the man behind the Fighting God was Badigadi...?

Orsted never told me anything like that.

"The Fighting God armor being lost is an old tale... However, best be cautious if Badigadi appears. Even now, a part of him feels indebted to that damn Hitogami. Mayhaps he will rally with the enemy."

"...Understood."

It's not that I want to fight with the cheerful Demon King.

But him becoming an enemy is something I need to keep in mind...

If possible, I want him to have long forgotten this debt and become my ally.

"Well, for someone who has turned Atofe ally, This One believes you should be able to deal with the current Badi, but please kill him not if you can help it."

Badigadi is Atofe's little brother and engaged to Kishirika. They're family.

Demons may be big-hearted, but I doubt they would sit back and be quiet over family being killed regardless of the circumstances.

"Very well. To begin with, I don't think I could kill him so simply, honestly."

"Indeed. Tenacity is the saving grace for immortal demons, so has it."

Kishirika said, glancing at Atofe.

Atofe was making a confident expression, but I think that it probably wasn't a compliment.

"Also...come just a bit closer."

Kishirika beckoned.

Lured by that, I approached her.

She had her hand close to her mouth, so it was likely a secret conversation.

"Move your face just a little closer."

"What is it—"

"Here, Sploosh."

Kishirika suddenly thrust her fingers into my left eye and I felt a sharp pain.

"Gighaaaahh!!"

I reflexively tried to escape to behind, but Kishirika had a hold on my hair and I couldn't.

I'm wearing the Mark II Magic Armor, so why can't I escape!?

It hurts, it hurts!

Oh, actually, it's probably best to...not run from this.

"Oh? You became docile."

I accepted Kishirika's action.

It did hurt, and was giving me a splitting headache.

I understood what she was doing by suddenly shoving in her finger and fiddling around.

It's the second time, after all.

"It's over."

Finally, Kishirika pulled out her fingers.

Pain still remained in the eye as well as a sense of blindness.

But I understood all too well that I didn't lose my eyesight.

"One gift in exchange for something delicious is This One's personal rule."

"..."

"This eye makes the second."

I was kneeling before Kishirika on one knee while holding the eye that was in pain.

"This One has no concern in this battle, but This One has just a slight history with Hitogami. This one is a freebie and farewell gift."

I took off my hand and my vision was doubled, and as if one eye had been left in the palm of my hand; it was seeing completely different scenery.
It made my head hurt.

"Clairvoyance. An eye only for seeing the distant, but This One is sure you'll find use of it."

Clairvoyance, huh?

I promptly closed my right eye and gathered mana in my left eye.

Adjusting the mana just like when using the Foresight Eye, I tried to see far away.

I was overlooking Fort Necros's entrance from the audience hall.

There, a black knight had his helmet off and was scratching the top of his head.

I moved my sight even more.

When I gathered mana, the sky soared through my vision.

Like a camera that can zoom in endlessly, I steadily kept soaring.

I could see a crater, and in the crater was a town, but I couldn't see the entirety of the town.

I put in more mana to view ever further, but stopped at a mountain.

I could view the fine details of the mountain rocks, and a Great King Land Tortoise yawning, but that was all.

When there's an obstacle in the path, my gaze will be obstructed there.

Ceasing the flow of mana, my sight returned to my original position.

All it can do is simply view far away.

I can't call it easy to use even in flattery, but it's by no means bad.

"This One is sure the you at present can even accustom yourself to using two magic eyes simultaneously."

"Thank you very much."

I expressed my gratitude to her in honesty.

"Indeed. Well then, Rudeus! If you find yourself troubled again, you may rely on This One! As long as it has naught to do with Hitogami, I will aid you!"

Kishirika took off her manacles and cut the chains attached to her legs with a chop. Moreover, she ripped off her blue-striped pajamas, returning to her usual bondage outfit. Then, she made a powerful jump.

"Farewell! This One—Bfh!?"

Kishirika landed face-first.

Because Atofe had a tight hold on her leg.

"Hold it."

"What is it? You even interrupted This One's outstandingly cool exit scene."

Kishirika glared at Atofe while blood poured out of her nose.

Atofe undauntedly looked down over Kishirika.

"Listen to my request."

"What is this? This One won't listen to the person who suddenly captured This One and tossed This One into a prison. Hands off, shoo, shoo."

Kishirika wiped her nosebleed while shooing Atofe away with her other hand.

But, Atofe showed no mind to this and grabbed Kishirika by the collar.

The bondage outfit was stretched tight and the apex of Kishirika's small breasts were exposed to all.

Oohh!

No, Rudeus the Abstemious won't be tempted by such a... Kh!

"Tell me where Earl and Alex are. Rudeus needs strong men, right? They should be able to prove their worth."

"Uhm, This One told Rudeus but a moment ago...moreover, This One even gave him a magic eye as a special service... Any more is out of the question."

Earl and Alex.

I wonder who they are.

I'm sure they'll have some use since Atofe is saying so, though...

"Tell me."

"This~ One~ doesn't~ wanna~"

But Kishirika wasn't listening.

Still, I learned Gisu's location.

I may not know what he's up to, but even if it's an unreasonable request, I want to increase my allies.

The more allies, the better.

Unreasonable...?

Ah, that's right.

I had this, didn't I?

I recalled the existence of the sinister skull ring on my finger—Randolph's ring.

"Miss Kishirika, Miss Kishirika. Please take a look at this."

"Oh? What's this? This One finds it familiar, but where..."

"It's 'Randolph's wish'."

"Hm... Oh, Randolph! This One has remembered! That is that fellow's ring!"

Kishirika's reaction was dramatic.

To be specific, her complexion went deathly pale.

"Yes, yes, his wish... Because This One has become indebted to him, because This One is extremely indebted to him... Why is that each time he aids This One, "You can just eventually repay me, eventually, kuhuhuhu," with that laugh... Each time This One sees that smile, This One trembles in fear over what he might request..."

"You'll be even with this."

"Truly?! For true! Then, but a moment!"

Kishirika again stared into the air.

The search time took only a few seconds.

What a handy search engine she is.

"Earl I cannot tell. I believe he is somewhere around Asura, but whether he is in an area with dense mana or using a Magic Eye Seal, it is blurred. Alex is walking upon a road... His course leads him to the Kingdom of Bihaeril."

Bighaeril again...

Is this coincidence?

Atofe nodded in approval over the part I was thinking about.

"I see, then just perfect. Rudeus, if you head to Bihaeril, search for a man named Alexander. He should be helpful."

"What kind of person is he?"

"He's Kalmann III, the North God!"

Ohh, Kalmann III the North God!

He's one of the people I had thought of calling out to if I found him.

So his name was Alexander? I was under the impression his name was Kalmann.

...Huh?

But wait, why is he going to Bihaeril?

Why to where Gisu is?

Is it coincidence...?

Sounds like a trap.

Yep, it's a trap.

"Alright, is that all? This One is going now, ok? No one will grab This One's legs, waist, or shoulders, right? Then, farewell! Fahahahahaha! Fahahahahaha! Faha Faha Faahaahaa!"

While I was worried and Atofe was standing behind me with her arms folded, she left behind a Doppler effect and the loud laughter disappeared into the distance.

Was getting caught on purpose?

As ever, she's a person like the tempest.

Regardless, I've obtained Gisu's whereabouts and Clairvoyance.

Part 2

I bid farewell to Atofe and returned to Sharia.

I've caught wind of where Gisu is, but at the same time, I also obtained information that North God Kalmann III, one of the Seven World Powers, is heading toward the same place. All I have is a bad premonition about it.

Then, what to do?

Should I move to speak to the Sword God?

Would it be best to move out before Gisu can speak to Kalmann III, make Kalmann an ally, and quickly defeat him?

The latter is better for removing enemies and increasing allies, but if Gisu perceives my coming, he'll just run right away.

Since not running would mean he already has his fighting force in order, the former would be better.

Hmm...

I should still scout it out first.

In addition, I should prevent escape, arrange a force, and corner him with certainty.

It's a pity Kishirika had gone.

Were she here, I would have a more detailed account on the situation.

I suppose I couldn't just somehow keep that handy search engine around forever.

With these thoughts in mind, I had made it home.

"Oh, welcome back nya."

"You came back at the perfect time-nano."

There were two unusual people here, Rinia and Pursena.

They were sitting on my home's living room sofa as if they owned the place.

No, that's not actually accurate.

Sitting as if she owned the place was Eris.

Rinia and Pursena had their heads placed on Eris's lap and were being caressed behind their ears.

They were completely and utterly docile.

"Welcome back."

"Thank you."

Eris, upon seeing me, did not stop her hand and continued stroking.

"Boss, I have a report nya."

"And it's good news-nano!"

The two said while not getting up.

They were purring like they were extremely comfortable.

They've already been completely tamed, it seems.

"Here-nano."

Pursena, still lying down, passed me a piece of paper.

What an attitude...

I don't actually mind, though.

"A report came from the east nya. 'A demon with green hair that was the spitting image of the doll, with a jewel on his forehead—a Supard was sighted'... That's what's written on it nya."^[88]

"Oh, at last!"

I took the paper and read through it.

On it was written a concise report of the finding.

It looks like a certain country's trader had done business with a man.

Near him was a stick with a white handle wrapped in a cloth and he wore a metal-plated headband.

He was clad in a heavy robe and wore his hood low, but having gotten a glimpse under the robe due to a strong wind, the man was wearing something like a native dress identical to the dolls'.

Apparently he had bought medicine while trying to avoid attention.

They didn't know what kind of medicine he purchased, but his appearance resembled Ruijerd's.

"...What?"

Having read to the end, my eyes stopped on the final line.

'Location sighted: The Kingdom of Bihaeril, half a day west from the second largest town of Irell. A village near the Land Dragon Forest Valley.'

Bihaeril.

Hearing it three times in one day, even someone as dense as me will get it.

"So that's how it is..."

Gisu, North God Kalmann III, and Ruijerd.

It can't be a coincidence at this stage.

Something is definitely about to happen in the Kingdom of Bihaeril.

Or rather, Gisu is trying to make something happen.

Even this letter might be a trap laid by Gisu.

Maybe he will use Ruijerd as a shield, or just maybe even Ruijerd has been made an enemy.

It's too early to tell, but there is one thing I do know.

If there is a possibility that Ruijerd will be exposed to danger, even if Ruijerd is being used as bait to lure me in, then I have to go.

The preparatory phase is over.

The time for the decisive battle has come.

(End of volume 22)

Translator's Notes and References

1. TLN: It looks like Lilia talks in Keigo even in her thoughts. My power level of TL isn't high enough to TL all of that so you people have to deal with this for now. I apologize for inconvenience.
2. 「ま、なるようにしかなりませんわ」
3. gachari= onomatopoeia for door open and close.
4. Tln : Can someone tell me what does that (・) mean? It was in ch 228 as well. ((It's an interpunct written as furigana. In this case it says 天才児 "child prodigy" and the interpunct is given as if it's a reading over the 児 "child" character. I was personally wondering if it was suggesting that part of the text could be omitted, as in "child prodigy" but that's just my wild guess.))
5. Not sure. 失敗しても、なあなあで済ませようとする子でもありました。
6. Not Sure.
アイシャやシルフィ様が気を利かせて、ようやく全員あつまることが多いのです。
7. Not sure at all.
飄々として、おちゃらけていて、でもどこか、何か一本の芯を残しているギースそのものでした。
8. Needs better TL :
その覚悟を察してくれず、いつもチラチラとこちらに振り返ってしまうのは、ルーデウス様の良い所ですが、頼られてはいないようで、少しさびしい所でもあります。
9. A reference to FFIV, when a character is mind controlled. Best pic I could find
[1][おれはしょうきにもどった！]
10. TLN : I was dumbfounded at this sentence and went over it for like 15 mins. He really did say this. What the shit. END: that's how a fanatic of Roxyism talk in front of Roxy
11. TLN : Can be TLed more properly. 「構いませんが.....何かの願掛けですか？」

12. TLN : This is NOT racist. He's just saying that he intends to make company free of corruption or the like.....probably.EDN: To explain, he means that they will act above board, fair and honest. A japanese black company is one who exploit their employee's overtime, cheat on their benefits, etc. Many novels describe black companies, like Death March and Risou.
13. read:fusuma{ふすま}[japanese sliding screen]
14. TLN : Maybe she misunderstood it as bedding since it can be read as bedding as well. I don't know.
15. TLN : 鉾神(aragane kami)
16. TLN : See World Map 3 for this. I TLed it as well. :^
17. Not sure. 背に腹は代えられないってわけじゃない。
18. Aka Dragon King Kingdom/Kingdom of Dragon King/Ouryuu Kingdom.
19. Kind of sort of like the U.S. ((Chapter 52 also said as much, regarding the country's lack of tradition.))
20. Death God's real name.
21. I think this is like a generic martial arts standoff where the opponents circle each other, with Randolph trying to use Rudy to block Eris' superior range and reflexes.
22. Also implies a feeling of guilt that I don't know how to convey in English without being overly wordy.
23. 特にいい手も思いつかなかったもので Bad TL.
24. For those who don't recall, the apostles in the Shirone arc were unclear, aside from the assassinated Leonard Kingdragon. Orsted assumed the other two were a Shirone general (possibly the warlord Jade) and the King of Vista, whose army Rudeus fended off on Pax's behalf. Randolph would probably be smart enough to figure out that Orsted was involved in Kingdragon's death if he heard that he had been an apostle, but this line sounds like Rudeus told him everything.
25. Randolph refers to Benedict as Queen, Rudy refers to her as Princess; despite her being a widow.
26. Step 1: Set a fire, Step 2: Sell the water to put it out, Step 3:???? , Step 4: Profit.

27. TLN: in the line 時にはギンギラギンの甲冑を着た騎士を並べ, I don't know what ギンギラギン means but I guess it's somewhat closer to silver clothing so I'll just leave it at that.
28. TLN: 甲冑[katchuu](armor and helmet). Don't know and can't find a more appropriate TL. Pic related if confused <http://a.pomf.se/mbswbx.jpg>
29. TLN: 金剛力士[kongourikishi]=fierce guardian god
30. TLN : Not sure グラーヴェル
31. TLN : The TL is right but don't know about the reference. そろそろ、半魚人になってしまいそうだ。
32. TLN : Needs some discussion over this. シャガール・ガルガンティス
33. TLN : カークランド・フォン・キングドラゴン。
34. TLN: 王竜王ステルヴィオ. Here Dragon King is the title given to him for his magic power(probably)and King is because he's the king. So that's why calling him King with his title intact.....Yeah, I know I fucked up, it can't be helped.
35. Not sure.
今、俺は、重要人物であるシャガールやカークより、この王の事が気になっている。
36. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yakiniku>
37. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamagoyaki>
38. This hero and the ones above are different words.
39. <http://sailormoon.wikia.com/wiki/Shitennou>
40. Again, two different words for hero here.
41. This is getting on my nerves.
42. Like a trumpet fanfare
43. ㊤
44. not sure.
骨と骨の間に剣を突き刺し、支え棒のようにすることで、最強の剣技と謳われる光の太刀を。

45. TLN : ベゴン[begon]. Yup, no idea. It's an SFX but not sure whether it's right.
46. //Not sure. 「床見ろよ。黒曜鋼鉄がえぐれてんだぜ？」
47. TLN : Parasyte reference
48. TLN : DBZ(Cell) reference?
49. Not sure :
「愉快的話だ。親父がどれだけ苦心しても勝てなかった龍族に、木っ端のごとき人
族が追いつこうというのだから.....」
50. TLN : Tree person <http://a.pomf.se/weuokd.jpg>
51. Not sure : ケイドロじゃあるまいし、全員解放というわけにもいかない。
52. TLN : This is probably some kind of slang/reference.
開けてみてのお楽しみ、って事か。
53. As in the Piranha Plants from Mario. Same flowers that appeared in chapter 23.
54. Previously romanized as Baglah Haglah (Chapter 63.5) and simply Bagurahagura
(World Map 2). You figure it out.
55. The translation originally had it romanized as "Licorice", but I'm changing it here to
be consistent with the earlier chapters.
56. Reference to M.Bison from Street Fighter (which is to say, the one named Vega in the
Japanese version--well, you probably know all about that already).
57. I don't think this can be translated as 'support', it's more like they respectfully met
with him and heard him out.
58. They're playing house, this tripped me up for an unbelievable amount of time. To make
things simple, I'm just going to label speakers in this part.
59. Baby-speak
60. Dog sounds. I don't like the idea of translating these into 'Bark Bark' or 'Bow-wow' or
something like that, so I'll leave it as Romaji as previous TLs have.
61. Going for an Oscar nomination? This seems completely out of character even for
playtime. I'm generally unsure about this section.

62. Is this a thing? I don't think it's a thing in the U.S.? I almost want to go with a U.S. trope and call it a dysfunctional family or sham family or pseudo-family.
63. Fudged.
64. TLN : Sylphy uses 'Boku('I' for male). I'm sure you probably already know, but still just to be sure.
65. TLN : Norse mythology hero Siegfried/Sigurd
<https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/ジークフリート>. Fun fact: Siegfried wasn't immortal in the truest meaning, when he was bathing in the dragon's blood a leaf fell and covered a small part of his back making him mortal there. Foreshadowing?
66. TLN : Don't know how to put it more meaningfully. 人のやることに絶対は無いのだ。
67. TLN : Not sure. あんな最速のタイミングで来るぐらいだし.....。
68. TLN : Not sure at all. いっそ神々しいとまで言ってしまえるほどの光景だ。
69. TLN : Not sure : 「ですが、ペルギウス様、戦いにはならぬかと」
70. TLN : HAHAHA, HOLY SHIT. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saladin>
71. TLN : Not sure. 断る理由はあるが、断る道理は無い。
72. TLN : めっ. The 'no' here represents this. It's like scolding someone, but didn't know how to properly tl it.
73. Maybe a reference to last chapter?
74. I think he actually just made up this sound effect.
75. Not sure here, TLC please.
76. Still unsure about this.
ここは一つ、ペルギウスを仲間にいれようとして失敗した、ぐらいの心積もりで頑張るとしよう。
77. Unsure about this one.
風呂の中でエリスとも話をしたのか、陰悪な空気は流れていない。
78. As in trying not to stand out and isolating herself. If you can think of a better way to put it, please change it.
79. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urashima_Tar%C5%8D

80. Yes, there was an equals sign here. It's all katakana, too.
81. 全てを捨てたつもりはないが、でも積極的に見せていくつもりもない。 Not sure about this one.
82. Logic might be a bit loose here, needs a double-check.
現在では、Orstedは誰にも介入されず、勝利するまでループする最強の存在よ
83. Never noticed this before, but she's referring to Hitogami as Hitokami(人神)
84. Stone monuments? I don't know what else she could be referring to.
85. Chapter title is a pun, can be read as "second" or "two eyes". It's more traditionally the former, so I went with that.
86. The fort's name is based off of a game called "Necros no Yousai/The Fortress of Necros" for the TurboGrafx-16.
87. TLC - 対する魔王は、遠く、明後日の方を向いて黄昏れた。
88. TLN: I saw the original translator, the deviantartwhoeverguy, noted that it was literally "Superudo" but translated it as Supard because...why? There's tons of ways to translate the term—Sperd, Speld, Superd, etc—but I don't see how he got Supard. ((Note from another editor: You're debating the spelling on Chapter 10, and not on, oh I dunno, chapter 4?))

